# ATTILA

the Hun king

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# Contents

## Smoke over the steppe

The steppe is no place to write poetry. It's the ass end of the world, flat as a board, except the board is full of cracks, holes, and dung. Imagine choking up your last meal, laying it in the sun, and waiting for the flies to come—that's the steppe. Nothing blooms here except the stench of horse sweat and the smoke of burnt villages. And above this endless, flat grave for idiots rides Attila, the bastard who wants to set the world on fire, not out of ideals, but because he can, and because he laughs while doing it like a drunk who's just spent his last coin on a hooker.

The sky hangs low, a grayish-yellow, as if it had drunk too much. Plumes of smoke creep across the grass, which is more dead than alive. It smells of burnt fat, of human flesh, and if you think that's an exaggeration, then you've never seen a corpse swell in the sun until it bursts. The Huns laugh at this; they always laugh when something rots. They have the humor of butchers—blunt, bloody, with a handful of dirt on its face. And somewhere in the middle of it all, a horse that looks as if it's about to collapse, but it keeps going because it knows: If it stops, one of the guys will eat it that very night.

The steppe doesn't talk to you. It eats you. You think you're tough, a warrior, a man with muscles and scars, but the steppe shits on your muscles. You're just a dot in this vastness, smaller than the pile of horse dung your horse is currently dropping. And when you die, you just lie there until the crows peck out your eyes. There's no honor here, no heroic songs. There's only dust, shit, and blood.

The Huns breathe it like oxygen. For them, the smoke over the steppe is like a damned festive scent. They ride through burnt huts as if they were cornfields in spring. They don't stop; they just gather everything that screams or shines. Women, children, goats, gold pieces—everything ends up in the same sack. And when night comes, their campfires burn so brightly that you can see them for miles, as if they're giving the heavens the middle finger.

Attila rides ahead. No radiance, no heroic glory, just a guy with a scarred face who stinks more of horse and old beer than of king. His armor isn't shiny tin, but rather cobbled-together iron, leather, and fur. He looks like a pile of dirt that's just learned to walk, and that's precisely what makes him dangerous. He doesn't carry a throne, but a spear and a knife, and that's enough. Because behind him are men who stink just as much, laugh just as much, and kill just as much as he does. They follow him not because he's divine, but because he's even dirtier, more brutal, and hungrier than they are.

And above everything lies this smoke. A black blanket over the steppe, suffocating everything. The wind whistles through, tearing shreds from burnt roofs, driving the sparks further so that the next village is frightened in advance. Sometimes, when the wind shifts, the smell hits you right in the face: burnt hair, burnt skin, burnt life. You can't help it, you have to vomit. But the Huns just laugh and say, "Do you smell that? That's the scent of freedom." Freedom, my ass. That's the scent of a thousand dead that no one misses anymore.

They rode for days without a break. No maps, no roads, just the feeling that somewhere there was still something burning that could be picked up. The horses stumbled, the men peed in the saddle, and if one fell, he stayed there. No stopping, no looking back. The steppe had its own laws: if you were too weak, you would become dust. Attila knew this; he was the embodiment of this law. He was no hero; he was the rat who had learned to eat faster than everyone else. And damn it, he ate with style—if you saw style in ripping a woman's dress off while a village was burning behind you.

The sun is slowly setting, but it doesn't create beautiful colors. No romantic red, no cheesy purple. It's a sick, dirty orange, like a drunk's eye about to burst. The riders' shadows stretch across the burnt grass, long and sharp like knives. And in this light, they don't look like men, but like demons. Demons who always bring their own hell with them, no matter where they ride.

One coughs, spitting a thick lump of phlegm into the grass. Another draws his knife and cuts a piece of meat from a goat that's been hanging half-dead over the horse for hours. The smoke settles on everything, even their teeth, and when they grin, it's not gold that glitters, but black soot. That's the truth of the steppe: no glamour, no beauty, just smoke over the horizon, a sign that somewhere, someone just got fucked—in the worst sense of the word.

And Attila? He sees it all, he smells it all, and he laughs. Not loudly, not like a madman, but deeply, dryly, the way someone laughs who knows the world is just a bad joke, and he's the only one who gets it. Smoke over the steppe—that's his melody, his love song. And he knows: as long as the sky remains black, this damned world belongs to him.

The Huns aren't heroes, they're not handsome riders posing on shining horses like in a painting for some imperial asshole in Rome. No, the Huns are like rotten dogs who've lain in the sun too long and still growl whenever you get too close. Every single one stinks of sweat, of old blood, of cheap mead they

stole from a cracked barrel somewhere. Their faces are so cut with scars that you wonder if the steppe itself threw knives at them.

They don't talk much, except to insult each other. "You stink worse than your horse." - "And yours is already dead, can't you tell?" - that's what it sounds like. Laughter like rusty nails in a tin can. They have no manners, no damned discipline, just this raw, ugly survival. They fight out of boredom, tearing each other's last pieces of meat from the fire, and if one of them falls over from drinking too much, the next one kicks him in the ribs, just to see if he'll puke or die.

The horses are no better. Broken, half-starved beasts, but with more hatred in their eyes than any Roman legionnaire. They stumble, they pant, and sometimes they simply collapse mid-gallop. And what do the Huns do? They dismount, beat the animal until it stops twitching, and immediately cut off a piece of meat. No thanks, no pity, just hunger and onward. That's their law: Everything is food. Even you, if you become weak.

In the evening, the camp looks like a hell that's burned down too many times. Tents made of rags, bones in the dirt, barrels half empty, half full—depending on how you look at it. The men sit in a circle, tearing each other's loot from their hands: a piece of bread, a fur, a woman. Yes, the women too. Dragged shadows, sitting at the edge, with empty eyes and torn clothes. They're no longer people, they're prey. If someone howls too loudly, they get a fist in the face until silence reigns.

The Huns then laugh. They always laugh when someone bleeds, whether it's the enemy or their own comrade. Blood is entertainment. They joke while wiping their beards. "Your face looks like your ass now." - "Yours too, only worse." - Laughter, a slap in the face, a fist back. No one is offended, no one is hurt; it's just their way. Pain is their game, just as mead is their water.

Sometimes someone comes along with a song, off-key and loud, the words half-garbled, the melody so off-key that even the crows want to vomit. But they roar along because there's nothing else. Music on the steppe means a hoarse throat and a mug of mead. The horses defecate next to it, the flames cast long shadows, and the whole thing looks more like a gathering of madmen than an army. But that's precisely their strength: they're so chaotic that no one can stop them.

They sleep in the dirt, right next to what they burned during the day. Some with their faces in the mud, some with their hands on the blade, as if that

would save anything. The steppe is cold at night, so cold that your teeth chatter while your ass sticks to the mud. But none of them complain. Complaining is for Romans, who grew up with warm baths and perfume. The Huns spit in the cold and go back to sleep, as if that were their natural state: half dead, half drunk, and ready to snap someone's neck at any moment.

And when the sun rises again, it looks like they've never been gone. Faces covered in dirt, eyes red as blood, and yet they climb onto their horses as if they were indestructible. But that's just a lie. Every single one of them has been broken for a long time. They're just too stupid or too proud to realize it. They're dogs who were beaten until they learned to bite back. And they do it again and again.

Attila knows this. He looks at this horde and sees no heroes, no soldiers. He sees broken dogs that he can unleash on the world like a pack. And that's precisely why he loves them. Because he himself is no better. He is the biggest broken dog of all, with more scars, more hunger, more hatred. He is not their king; he is their mirror image, only bigger, uglier, deadlier.

So they march on, a bunch of broken dogs with broken horses, and the smoke of the steppe hangs over everything. No fairy tale, no ballad—just the filth of the world, compressed into a single troop of bastards that eat everything that moves.

The smell of smoke is like a constant companion. Just as other people have a dog that faithfully runs by their side, the Huns have smoke. It sticks in their hair, in their furs, in their horses, even in the mead they drink. There isn't a day that goes by when they don't set fire to something, be it a house, a barn, or simply an old tree in the way. Fire is their toy, and smoke is their perfume.

You wake up, and the first thing you smell is burnt wood mixed with the sweet stench of meat. Not the good meat from the grill, no—this is human flesh, dogs, pigs, all mixed together, until it makes no difference anymore. Some would vomit, but the Huns just laugh. They wrinkle their noses, inhale deeply as if it were fresh morning air. To them, that's the smell of victory. And if you're around long enough, you start to smell it the same way. You stop noticing the differences. Everything is just smoke.

The cities they leave behind are no longer cities. They are burned skeletons that crackle as the wind blows through the charred beams. Ash is everywhere, as if a damned god had emptied a sack of dust. Children are still screaming somewhere until someone finds them and silences them. Women are dragged

out by their hair, dragged into tents, and if they're lucky, they're still alive the next day. Lucky. A word that on the steppe simply means: "You're not dead yet."

When the Huns march through such a wreck, it looks like a parade of death. They loot, they drink, they tear gold pieces from burned chests as if the metal were more valuable to them than anything else. Coins, still warm from the fire, stick to their fingers, and they laugh as if they'd just stolen from the sky. They carry the loot like trophies, throw it in the air, drop it into the dirt. Nothing has real value except the moment they seize it.

And in between, the fire. Always the fire. Sometimes it burns so high that you think the sky itself is ablaze. Sparks fly through the night, setting the grass ablaze, scaring the horses. But the Huns don't care. They sit there, drinking, while entire neighborhoods crumble behind them. To them, it's music. The crackling of the flames, the creaking of the beams, the screams of those not yet dead—that's their orchestra.

Sometimes—and this is the part where you really realize how messed up they are—sometimes they laugh when they smell the stench of burnt hair. They joke about how Romans all walk around with perms these days, or how heaven smells like freshly grilled ass. They have no inhibitions, no boundaries. Everything is fodder for a dirty joke, as long as you're still breathing.

And if one of them dies? Then they throw him into the same fire. No graves, no songs, just another stinking wisp of smoke in the sky. They say, "Now he rides with the wind." Bullshit. He's just ash that mixes with the rest. The steppe knows no heroes, only burnt bones that will eventually disintegrate.

Attila knows this better than anyone. He rides through the ruins, sees the burned faces, the empty eye sockets, and he doesn't even flinch. For him, these are all markers, signposts. Every burned city is like a sign saying: "Attila was here. Get lost, or you'll be next." He doesn't need statues, no chants. He has smoke. And the smoke tells his story louder than any poet could.

You can't escape. Even if you're a hundred miles away, you see the smoke. It drifts across the steppe as if it were trying to swallow the sun itself. Traders see it and turn around. Farmers see it and start digging holes for themselves, knowing their huts will soon be destroyed. The smoke is faster than the Huns; it announces them, like an ugly trumpet in the sky. And once it hangs over you, you can be sure: there is no tomorrow.

This is everyday life. Not a day without fire, not a day without smoke. The Huns need it like water. It warms them, it feeds them, it entertains them. They sit around it, slobber mead onto the ground, throw bones into the fire, and watch the fat sizzle. The sizzle is like music. They stare into the fire until their eyes turn red, and swear they see faces in it—enemies screaming as they burn. And then they laugh again, because they like it.

The Romans may build palaces, theaters, temples, marble, and statues. The Huns build only one thing: piles of corpses. And they burn better than any play. The difference is: the Romans pretend to be civilized, while the Huns don't lie at all. They say: "We'll burn you down, we'll fuck you to pieces, we'll take everything." It doesn't get any more honest than that. It's dirty, brutal, but at least it's real.

And the smoke? It remains. Even after the Huns have moved on, it lingers in the sky for days, as if it refuses to disappear. It creeps into every crack, into every fiber, into every damned dream. The survivors cough, vomit, and when they close their eyes at night, they still see the fire. Smoke is a memory, smoke is a warning, smoke is the damn crown that Attila is dragging across the steppe.

This is how they live, day after day. No calendar, no clock, just fire and smoke. The sky a black mirror, the ground a bed of ash. And in the middle of it all, a horde of men so broken that they feel at home in this hell. For them, this isn't the end – it's Tuesday.

Attila wasn't a king in shining robes. He wasn't a bastard with a laurel wreath and a gold spoon in his mouth. He was a bastard who smelled of old sweat, of horse, of cheap mead, and of blood that never quite came off his fingers. When he climbed into the saddle, he didn't look like a ruler—he looked like the leftover guy in the bar who's beaten everyone up before and yet no one contradicts him because he still has the biggest fist.

He didn't talk much. When he opened his mouth, it sounded like a stone being dragged across concrete—dry, ugly, without melody. He didn't tell stories, no speeches about gods or fame. He said things like, "Kill faster, before the beer warms up." Or, "If he coughs, slit his throat, then there'll be peace." And that's exactly how he was. Simple, direct, brutal. Not a philosopher, not a diplomat, but a damn hammer that smashed everything in front of it.

The men loved that. Not the way Romans love their emperors—forced, under statues and parades. No, the Huns followed him because he was just like them, only worse. He drank more, he fucked more, he hit harder. He wasn't a role

model, he was a mirror. They saw in him what they themselves would like to be: a bastard without fear, without doubt, without mercy.

His eyes were the worst. Black, small, hard like two nails hammered deep into wood. When he looked at you, you felt like he knew immediately whether you were a dog or a human—and most of the time, he chose dog. There were stories of him silencing men with just a look. I swear, when he looked at you, you felt smaller than the shit his horse dropped.

Once—and this is a story that circulated around every campfire—he was sitting there drinking mead when a guy next to him started coughing. Nothing special, just a terrible cough, the kind everyone gets when the dust scratches their lungs. But Attila didn't like interruptions. He turned his head, stared at the man, stood up, and kicked him so hard in the chest that he fell to the dirt, gasping for breath. Everyone thought that was it, but Attila took his spear, pressed it across the coughing man's neck, and whispered, "Now cough again." Then there was silence. Forever.

No one moved. No one dared to breathe. And that's precisely why he was the boss. Because he didn't argue for long, because he didn't act as if there were rules. His only rule was: Attila talks, you listen. If he doesn't, you eat dust. Period.

He wasn't a handsome man. His nose was crooked, as if someone had tried to straighten it with a hammer. His lips were thin, full of cracks, always dry, always bloody. His teeth were crooked, but hard as small stones. And his face? A patchwork of scars. Every cut told a story, but he never told it. He simply wore them, like a dog carries fleas. Natural, unpleasant, but part of the package.

And yet—or perhaps because of it—he had a charisma that made you shiver. Not that heroic, brilliant glow. No. He was like a hole in the room. When he was there, nothing else mattered. He sucked in your attention like a black hole, and you couldn't look away, even though you knew it was tearing you apart.

He rarely laughed, and when he did, it was worse than when he was serious. A dry, ragged sound that sounded like someone breaking bones. Not humor, not fun, but mockery. At you, at the world, at everything. As if he were saying, "You're all already dead, you idiots. I'm just the first to notice."

Women had no other place with him than they did with the other Huns. Prey, meat, distraction. But when he took one, it wasn't out of lust. It was as if he wanted to prove that even the most beautiful things in this world were nothing

more than dust beneath his feet. Some said he hated beauty. Others said he simply had no room for such things in his rotten soul. The fact is: every one he took came back more broken than when she left.

His shadow hung over everything. The men could laugh, fight, drink—but as soon as he appeared, everything fell silent. Not out of fear of being beaten, but out of that damned respect you can't fake. They knew he was not only their leader, but also their judge, their executioner, their last hope. Without him, they would just be a bunch of stinking bastards. With him, they were a force that made entire empires tremble.

And he knew it. He wasn't playing king, he didn't need a crown. His throne was the saddle, his kingdom the steppe, his crown the smoke that rose everywhere behind him. When he spoke, it was like thunder; when he was silent, it was like a grave. Everything revolved around him, whether you wanted it or not.

So his shadow moved across the steppe, larger than any flame, darker than any smoke. He was no myth, no hero. He was simply Attila. And that was enough to curse the world.

The steppe has no sense of humor. It's a stinking slab of dust, ash, and bones, and if you think it's giving you a smile, it's just the wind mocking you before blowing sand in your face. The steppe never laughs; it eats you, spits you out, and then the horses trample your remains. Every pile of manure here has more staying power than a person.

The Huns know this. That's why they laugh for the steppe. They holler, they drink, they vomit into the fire, and they kick each other in the face—because they know that the steppe itself doesn't make a sound. Everything is silent here, silent as a grave, and if you rely on that, you're screwed. So they make the noise themselves. Noise against the silence. Laughter against death. They laugh not because it's funny, but because it's the only answer to this nothingness.

When you lie at night, somewhere in the dirt, you hear the horses snorting, the men belching, and far away, the crackling of wood that isn't quite burned out yet. And then when you look up at the sky, you see nothing, absolutely nothing. No stars, no damn romance. Just smoke, draped over you like a blanket. You think the sky has forgotten you, and maybe it has. Maybe there never was a heaven. Maybe there's only the steppe, and the steppe doesn't give a damn about you.

Some say the steppe is free. No walls, no borders, just vastness. But that's just as much a lie as the fairy tales of Roman heroes. The vastness crushes you, it makes you small, it reminds you that you are nothing. Free? You're only free when you're dead and no one has to smell your stench anymore. Until then, you're just another bastard running through this nothingness, hoping to eat it before it eats him.

Attila understands this. He doesn't laugh to be happy. He laughs because he knows the steppe never laughs. He fills the hole with his own voice, with his own anger. He wants to be the only one who has a say here. And the men follow him because they feel the same. Each of them has seen miners lying in the dirt, women screaming, children disappearing in the smoke. But no one stops, no one turns around. They ride on, because standing still here means nothing but death.

The steppe never laughs, but it whispers. It whispers through the wind, through the bones, through the crackling of the fires. It whispers: "You are only dust." And the Huns answer with blood. They kill, they burn, they destroy, just to contradict this whisper. But deep down, they know: in the end, they are only dust too. Their bones will lie here in the grass, just as white as those of the Romans they slaughter.

Maybe that's why they're so greedy. They devour gold, women, land—everything they can get. Not because they need it. Not because they can keep it. But because they know the steppe will swallow it all. And before they themselves are devoured, they want to at least briefly feel like they've fucked the steppe itself. Even if it's a lie.

The steppe never laughs, but sometimes the horses' neighing sounds like a mockery. These animals are just as broken as their riders, and yet they keep running, as if afraid that nothingness will catch up with them. Perhaps they are the only ones who truly feel the truth. Horses are not poets, not dreamers. They simply run until they collapse. And then they are eaten. Period. Perhaps that is the most honest way to live here.

There are moments when silence swallows everything. No wind, no cough, no belch. Only stillness. And then you realize: This is the steppe, this is its true face. No laughter, no life, just this damned abyss of dust. Anyone who can't stand it dies faster than they can pee. The Huns can stand it. They've learned to vomit, scream, fuck, and kill in this silence. Anything just to keep from going crazy.

And Attila? He's the only one who truly lives there. He's the face of the steppe, the shadow that's larger than everything else. When he laughs, it sounds like an echo from this void. When he kills, it sounds like the heartbeat of the ground. He's not human; he's the embodiment of this damned, nothing landscape. That's why they follow him. Not because he's beautiful, not because he's just, but because he's the only thing that makes a sound in this damned void.

So every day ends in smoke and silence. Fires go out, ashes remain, men piss in the grass, horses sleep in the dirt. And above all lies the truth: The steppe never laughs. It doesn't need to. It knows that in the end, everything remains here: bones, gold, dreams, blood. Everything turns to dust, everything is forgotten. And the Huns ride on, as if they could outpace oblivion.

But they are wrong.

## The horse stinks of freedom

Freedom. A shitty word. The Romans paint it into their speeches, philosophers cram it into their books, and priests sell it like rotten apples at the market. But ask a Hun what freedom is, and he'll point you to his horse. No banner, no anthem, no statue—just a stinking, snorting animal that emits more fart odor than Rome emits perfume in a whole month. Freedom stinks of horse. Period.

The Huns can't live without their horses. They sleep next to them, they shit on them, and if they have no other choice, they'll eat them. A Hun without a horse is like a drunk without booze—he exists, yes, but he's just a shadow, a joke. If you're born here, you're strapped to a horse before you can walk. Your ass knows the saddle better than any bed. You learn to sleep, piss, drink, and fuck in the saddle. Freedom means living your life at a gallop.

And the horse stinks. Always. It sweats, it poops, it stinks of wet fur, of dust, of blood when it's being chased in battle. But that's exactly the stench the Huns want to breathe. If you don't love the smell of horse, you're not a Hun, but a Roman sitting in the bathtub, afraid of a mosquito bite.

The horses themselves aren't beautiful animals. They're not noble stallions with shining manes, celebrated in poems. Hun horses are small, tough, and vicious. They look like they stepped straight out of hell, with legs that are too short and too much hate in their eyes. But they run. Holy crap, they run until their bones show. And when they collapse, you cut out the meat and eat it while you grab the next nag.

Attila knew this better than anyone else. His horse was his throne, his bed, his table, his coffin. He rode more than he stood. When he slept, he slept with his head on his horse's neck. When he thought—and yes, the bastard thought more than he showed—he always thought to the rhythm of the hooves. He was a man, but in reality, he was half-horse, a monster that devoured the dust and transformed it into war.

The horse is the only constant in this life. Women come and go, mead barrels run dry, fires burn out, friends die – but the horse keeps running. On and on. Even when you're hanging there vomiting in the saddle, it keeps running. Even if your leg breaks, it carries you. Even when half the world is chasing you, it keeps you going until the smoke at your back diminishes. That's why they call it freedom. Not the freedom to do what you want. But the freedom to keep running when it's all over.

The steppe is a damned prison without walls. Flat, endless, always the same shit. But the horse turns it into an open door. Without a horse, you're imprisoned; with a horse, you're the devil, leaping from village to village, faster than fear. No foot soldier can keep up, no peasant, no emperor. A Hun in the saddle is a shadow you can't grasp. And if you try to grasp him, he's already rammed his spear into your stomach.

And if you think freedom smells like flowers, sea air, or some other lying bullshit, then you've never smelled a whole troop of Hun horses galloping. That's freedom: a stench so pungent it makes your eyes water, mixed with dust, blood, and the scream of someone they're riding down. Freedom stinks. And the Huns love it.

The life of the Huns takes place in the saddle. They don't mount their horses in the morning—they dismount, if at all. Sometimes they forget what it's like to have solid ground beneath their feet. They sleep, eat, piss, fuck—everything up there. A Roman would look like a beaten sack of flour after a day in the saddle. A Hun? He wouldn't even notice. For him, the saddle is his ass, his bed, his throne, and his grave all rolled into one.

When they eat at a gallop, they stuff their mouths with raw meat that they've pounded softly under the saddle. No joke—they stick chunks of meat between the leather and the horse's back, let the sweat and movement soften the thing, and after a few hours, you bite into it. It tastes of salt, of animal, of sweat. But it keeps you alive. Romans cook with spices, Huns cook with horse's ass.

In the saddle, they sleep like bums on a park bench: half awake, half dead, but always ready to draw a knife. A Hun won't fall off, even if he's unconscious from drinking. The horse carries him on, and if he pukes, the horse just slaps his neck. Freedom means: your horse carries you, even when you're too drunk to look straight ahead.

Shit? Sure, even in the saddle. You crouch to the side, let it flow, and carry on. The stench mixes with everything else, and nobody cares. The steppe is big enough to swallow your shit. And if it doesn't—what the heck, the next person will step in.

Sex in the saddle isn't uncommon either. Women are hoisted up like a sack of grain, and if the horse stumbles, it's just a quickie. No bed, no roof, just the rhythm of the hooves and the groans lost in the wind. Rome writes poems about love, the Huns ride her to death.

Children learn early. A little bastard can barely walk when he's put on a horse. No choice, no training with wooden horses or teachers. He's thrown straight onto the toughest animal in the stable, and if he falls off, there are no tears, only kicks. "Get up there, you little dog, or you'll die." That's how you grow up: with your ass in the saddle and the fear that your father will slap you if you don't hold on.

And then there are the horses themselves: restless, snappy, covered in scars. They aren't petted; they are beaten until they obey. But they obey because they know: Huns will kill their own horses if necessary. No room for sentimentality. Either you carry your rider, or you'll become his dinner. Simple deal.

The Romans build roads, aqueducts, and palaces. The Huns build horse heaps. Their entire civilization is in the saddle. No house, no farm, no field. Everything they own hangs from the saddle pommel: weapons, skins, furs, sometimes half a pig. They move on, ever on, because standing still means death. The horses turn them into nomads, shadows that come and go, leaving no trace but smoke and blood.

And there's this ugly truth: The Hun without a horse is nothing. Absolutely nothing. A foot soldier might still hold a sword, a farmer at least has his field, a Roman his walls. But the Hun without a horse is just a half-naked bastard with a bow in his hand and no chance. He's only strong while in the saddle. That's why they keep their horses closer than anything else. Closer than wives, closer than brothers. The horse is your life.

That makes them dangerous. They're one with these stinking creatures. You see a hundred riders on the horizon, and you think they're demons. Half human, half horse, a wave of dust, noise, and spears. And before you realize they're just stinking creatures, your village has been ridden down, your daughter is gone, your house is burning.

In the saddle, they are free. Free from rules, free from boundaries, free from everything the Romans so proudly shove up their asses. No tax collector, no emperor, no god can stop a Hun at a gallop. And that's precisely what makes them so merciless. Freedom for them doesn't mean, "I can do whatever I want." Freedom means, "No one can stop me if I want to kill you."

Life in the saddle isn't a poem, it's a curse. Your ass bleeds, your legs fall asleep, your back aches, and yet you don't get off. Because you know: Going off means being weak. And being weak means being dead.

Attila himself is said to have spent weeks in the saddle without dismounting once. Men told stories that he rode on in his sleep, that he took women at a gallop, that he even threw his damned spear while tying his trousers. Whether it's true is irrelevant. It sounds like what he is: a bastard who not only uses the saddle, but is fused with it.

That's what life in the saddle is like: a stench, a torment, a rush. But it's also all they have. Freedom stinks, freedom hurts, freedom bites you in the ass – and yet you still don't let go.

The horse isn't a decoration. It's not a damn luxury item for rich Romans to stroll through their gardens while slaves sweep up the shit. For the Huns, the horse is a weapon—harder, faster, deadlier than any sword. Anyone who doesn't understand that dies with a hoof in their face.

When a hundred Huns ride, it's like an earthquake. Not that noble clatter you hear in movies. No, it's a thunder, a crack, a clang that makes your teeth vibrate. Clouds of dust rise, so thick you can't see your own hand. And from this filth, this dust, comes death. No trumpet call, no orderly marching—just chaos, noise, and panic.

The horses themselves are like spears on four legs. Small, agile, fast. They leap over ditches, they ram into crowds, they trample down anything that doesn't run away. A Roman in full armor may be a bulwark, but if a Hun rams his chest, he lies on the ground like a beetle that's fallen on its back. Then the rider comes along, draws his spear, and that's the end.

A bow in the saddle is the perfect complement. A Hun can shoot at a gallop without his hand shaking. Imagine that: You think you're far enough away, you see only dust, and suddenly an arrow sticks in your throat. You don't even see where it came from. The Huns shoot forward, backward, sideways—it doesn't matter. Every shot hits home. It's as if they have the bow in their blood, and the horse gives them the wings to go with it.

Attila knew exactly what a gift these animals were. For him, the horse wasn't just transport; it was half the army. Without horses, there would be no Hunnic Empire; without horses, there would be no fear; without horses, there would be no Attila. That's why he never allowed them to weaken. Horses were treated better than prisoners, sometimes better than his own men. A horse that collapsed at least got a knife in the neck, quickly and painlessly. A man who collapsed got a kick and was left lying there.

The Romans hated those horses. They hated that they couldn't be stopped. Walls, roads, legions—all were useless against an enemy who came and went like the wind. You can build a wall against a foot soldier, but what do you do against an enemy mounted on a stinking nag who's riddled with arrows before you even draw your sword? Nothing. You die.

The Huns knew this. They used their horses like knives. They cut through lines, through fields, through entire cities. They weren't the greatest warriors, not the best blacksmiths, not the cleverest strategists. But they had horses. And those horses turned a bunch of stinking bastards into the damned scourge of the world.

And never underestimate the power of such a horse. When it runs, it runs with a hundred kilos of Hun in the saddle, with armor, spear, and bow. It's a projectile of flesh and bone, a battering ram on four legs. One horse kicks you, and you're dead. No argument. Skulls like melons, ribs like dry branches—everything breaks. And the Huns laugh as they ride on.

They trained their horses brutally and mercilessly. No sugar, no carrots. Just whips, screams, and blood. A horse that disobeyed was slaughtered. But a horse that obeyed was part of the family. If you didn't become one with your horse, you were lost. Some say the Huns could sense what their horses felt. If the horse was frightened, the rider knew. If the rider was angry, the horse would speed up. Two bodies, one will, one weapon.

There are reports from Romans who said that a Hun attack was like a natural disaster. No orderly battlefield, no honorable engagement—just a wild, stinking

mass of horses and men rolling over you like a wave. You can't do anything about it, you can only hope that you die in the first rush and aren't slowly crushed under hooves.

And that was exactly the plan. They didn't want orderly battles. They wanted chaos. Chaos that moved faster than your brain could comprehend. While you were still trying to maintain your formation, you were already riddled with arrows. While you were still blocking the first horseman, ten others had passed you and exposed your back. The horses made the Huns invisible, intangible. Here today, there tomorrow, gone the day after. Like a nightmare that kept recurring.

Attila always rode in front. Not because he was braver, but because he knew that the first person his enemies would see would be himself. He wanted them to see his face before they died. And his horse ran as if Hell itself were on its tail. Sometimes, when he raised his spear, it looked as if he were one with the beast. Not a man, not a horse—but a damned demon, half flesh, half smoke.

The steppe provided them with horses, just as it provided smoke and dust. And the Huns turned them into weapons the likes of which the world had never seen. No sword, no shield could stop it. Horse and Hun – it was a unit that devoured everything. And the Romans hated it. They hated it because, with all their wealth, with all their order, with all their damned knowledge, they couldn't do anything about it. They had legions, but the Huns had horses.

And damn, the horses won.

When a Hun kills at a gallop, it doesn't look like war. It looks like a frenzy. A dirty, sweaty, stinking frenzy, where everything blurs except blood and speed. The gallop is the drug, and the blood is the kick. No wine, no mead, no woman gives you what a clean blow at full speed gives you.

Imagine: The earth shakes, the dust stings your eyes, your horse snorts like a devil, and you feel the ground give way beneath you. Your heart is no longer beating normally; it's racing, trying to catch up with its hooves. You raise your spear, you draw your bow, and you hit the target because everything's in rhythm. Man and horse, sweat and iron, all one. And then the blood. Warm, splashing, stinking. It hits you in the face, and you laugh because it's better than any damn shower.

The Huns aren't swordsmen. They're not the heroes you sing about in songs. They don't strike gracefully. They tear. They hack. They stab until the body

beneath them no longer twitches. Sometimes a kick from a horse is enough; sometimes they'll stick five arrows in you just because they can. At a gallop, there's no hesitation. You hit or you die. And they usually hit.

The galloping battle is chaos. Everything moves, everything screams, everything crashes into each other. Shields fly, spears break, horses neigh like tormented demons. There's no front, no back. Only dust, hoofbeats, blood. And in the middle of it all are the Huns, laughing like it's a damn drinking game. Every hit is a shot. Every dead body is an empty jug.

And the stench. Blood at a gallop smells different. Not like a slaughterhouse, not like a butcher's. It smells of iron, of shit, of fear. A Roman who bites the dust doesn't just shed blood, he also sheds his intestines. And the horses trample everything. Flesh, dirt, feces—a cocktail that soaks the steppe. And the Huns ride on as if it were raining.

Sometimes, when the sun was behind them, it looked as if they were riding through a sea of red. Blood on the horses' bodies, blood on their weapons, blood in their hair. So much that it glittered. A perverse glow, like a damned festival. Some Huns painted their faces with the blood of their enemies, smearing it like paint, grinning like clowns from hell. A Roman saw this and knew: It's over, no matter how many men he still has around him.

Attila loved this moment. He rode right in the middle of it, shouting, laughing, raising his spear like a god throwing lightning. But it wasn't lightning. It was spears that cracked bones, ripped open ribcages, split heads. He relished the sound—that dull crack when bones give way. No song, no prayer, no applause sounds as real as the sound of ribs breaking at a gallop.

There's something honest about blood at a gallop. No long speeches, no contracts, no fake drama. It's there immediately. You hit, he falls. The end. No god in between, no emperor, no damned law. Just you, your horse, and the blood. Freedom in its dirtiest form.

But it's also dangerous. One false step, and you're lying in the dirt yourself. And the dirt knows no mercy. Horses trample you, spears find your belly, arrows pierce your throat. As quickly as you kill, you can die. Every Hun knows that. And that's precisely why they ride even faster, strike even harder, laugh even louder. Because every blow could be their last.

The steppe absorbs the blood like a thirsty dog. No monument, no statue remains. Only red earth, soon to turn brown again. But in this moment, at a

gallop, it is everything. It is glory, power, life. It is the only proof that you existed. Not your name, not your stories—only the blood you shed.

And when the battle is over, when the horses are steaming and the dust settles, the Huns sit there, their faces smeared with blood, their hands sticking, and they drink. They drink because they survived, because they're still breathing, because they've felt the blood once more while galloping. And when they laugh, it sounds like the beat of hooves in the night.

Attila never says much afterward. He looks around, sees the corpses, sees the smoke, and just nods. For him, it's normal. Galloping blood is his everyday life. No celebration, no shock. Just another day in a world that knows nothing else.

And so they ride on, ever on. From battle to battle, from blood to blood. Free because no one can stop them. Free because the horse is faster than death. Free because the blood in the gallop makes them immortal—at least for a damned moment.

Freedom is a word that philosophers in Rome use like a cheap whore's ass. Everyone gets a chance, everyone writes something about it, and in the end, it smells of perfume and lies. But for the Huns, freedom isn't something you paint on papyrus or carve in marble. To them, freedom stinks. It smells of sweat, horse shit, rotten flesh, and blood steaming in the sun. Freedom isn't a dream. Freedom is a stench that stays in your nose until you vomit.

When the Huns ride, they're free. Not because they break laws—they've never had any. Not because they overthrow emperors—they don't give a shit about emperors. They're free because they don't have to ask anyone. No tax collector, no priest, no general to tell them what they're allowed to do. They take what they want, and if it goes wrong, they die. That's the whole deal. Freedom in the stench means: Everything's yours until someone kills faster than you.

The stench is everywhere. In the furs they wear, in the teeth they don't brush, in the horses that haven't seen water in weeks except for the one they pee through. The stench brings tears to your eyes, but the Huns breathe it in like a pleasant aroma. It's their perfume, their trademark. When you smell them coming, you know it's over. Freedom has a smell, and it announces itself before the first arrow flies.

The Romans don't understand this. For them, freedom is clean. White tunics, parades, noble speeches. Everything shines, everything smells of oil and

flowers. But that's not freedom. That's a prison in gold. The Huns laugh at it. For them, freedom is ugly, dirty, bloody. It doesn't look pretty, it doesn't smell good, but it's real.

A Hun wakes up, pisses in the dust, pulls a piece of meat from his hide, spits, mounts his horse—and he's free. No gate, no treaty, no border stops him. Only the wind and his horse. And when the horse dies, he takes the next one. So simple, so brutal, so honest. No illusions, no romance. Just dust, blood, stench—and freedom.

Attila embodies this. He rides in front, stinks worse than his men, and that's precisely what makes him real. No gilded throne, no marble palace. His realm is the steppe, his crown the dust, his scepter the spear. And his perfume? The stench of a thousand burnt huts. When he appears, you smell him before you see him. An emperor sends messengers. Attila sends his stench.

And the men follow him because they know that this stench is worth more than any Roman coin. He says: "Here I was. Everything here belongs to me now." Smoke, ash, blood – all signs of his freedom. And when they follow him, they breathe the same stench, wear the same filth, laugh the same dirty jokes about a world made of nothing but dust.

Freedom in the stench also means: You are always just a breath away from death. Every ride could be your last. Every arrow could hit you. Every fall could break you. But therein lies the truth. Freedom is not security. Freedom is risk. Freedom is the stench of life and death, mingling until you can no longer smell the difference.

After a battle, you sit there, covered in blood, dirt, and smoke. Your hands are sticky, your hair stinks, your horse is smoking. You're breathing heavily, you're almost going to puke. And yet you laugh. Because you're still alive. Because you're free. Because you know: It could have happened to you just the same, but the steppe hasn't eaten you yet. So you drink, you fuck, you ride on. Freedom never stops.

The steppe itself smells of death. But in death lies freedom. No field, no house, no wall can hold you back. Everything is movement, everything stench, everything is transient. Tomorrow your horse will be dead, the day after tomorrow your brother, next week perhaps you yourself. And yet you ride. Because you know: There is nothing else.

In the end, freedom isn't something you can explain. Freedom is what remains when you breathe amidst the dust, the smoke, the blood—and still keep riding. It's the stench that accompanies you, day after day, until you become a part of it yourself.

The Huns live by stinking. They die by stinking. And they laugh because they know that the Romans, in their clean baths, will never understand what freedom truly is: a horse, a spear, and the unmistakable smell of filth and death.

This is freedom in the stench. No anthem, no monument. Just a life as honest as the smell of shit in the wind.

## A king grows between bones

Attila wasn't born in silk, didn't shit in palaces like those imperial assholes in Rome. He came into the world like a dog in the dust. No lullaby, no midwife with gentle hands—just a tent made of skins that stank of horse, and a few women who'd seen so much blood they didn't care about another scream. He fell out, screamed, and outside the horses neighed, as if to say: Welcome to hell, little bastard.

A king doesn't grow among roses, but among bones. They lay everywhere, half-rotted, in the grass, in the dust. Old warriors no one bothered to bury anymore, horses that had died galloping, women forgotten. Bones were the children's toys. They threw them like sticks, built small towers, and bashed each other's skulls in with skulls. This is how Attila learned about the world: through bones, blood, dust, and the laughter of those who weren't yet dead.

His mother? No one knows exactly who she was. Some said she was a slave, others that she herself came from a horse-riding family. Who cares. To Attila, she was just the woman who gave birth to him, nursed him, and then left him in the dust as soon as he could walk. In this world, no one cares for long. Either you get up and eat, or you stay down and get eaten. Mother's love is a joke on the steppe.

His father was supposedly a leader, some bastard who had set half a city on fire. But he, too, disappeared quickly, probably under a pile of arrows or with his head in the dust. Attila grew up among men who talked more to horses than to children. His brothers, his cousins, his entire people were his family.

Family meant: Whoever was stronger would knock you down, and when you got up again, you were part of it.

Even as a child, he knew only the sound of hooves and the cracking of bones. He learned how to draw a bow before he knew how to take a proper piss. He learned to eat meat raw because no one waited until it was cooked. He learned that you must always have a knife under your head at night because your own brother might strangle you in your sleep.

And always these bones. Bones everywhere. Old battles, new battles, there was no difference. The steppe was a never-ending graveyard, and Attila played in it as if it were a playground. Sometimes he picked up a skull, pushed it in front of him like a ball, and kicked it until it broke. Other children joined in, laughing, screaming, and somewhere the dogs barked, wanting a piece too.

A king doesn't grow up in peace. He grows up learning early on that everything breaks: horses, people, dreams. And that you have to be the one who breaks things faster than the others. Attila was small, but he had that look, that black spark in his eyes that said: I'll eat you before you can eat me. No teacher, no priest had to teach him that. The steppe itself was his school, and the lesson was simple: Kill or die.

When he slept, he listened to the stories of the old men. No fairy tales, no heroic songs, just disgusting memories: "I cut open a man's stomach, he laughed until his intestines fell out." - "We tied the women to the horses and dragged them through the dust." That was the lullaby. And Attila absorbed it like milk. He grinned when he heard of blood, he fell asleep with images of burning huts. Even as a child, he was addicted to this filth.

He was no prince. No gold, no jewelry, no throne. He had only an old bow, a few arrows, and a horse smaller than himself. But he rode it as if he were born to ride it. He fell off, got back on. Fell off, got back on. Until his ass was fused to the saddle. The other children cried when they fell. Attila stood up, spat blood, and laughed. Even then, everyone knew: This boy is no ordinary dog.

A king doesn't grow among candles and books. He grows among flies dancing on corpses. And Attila was one of those flies. Small, inconspicuous, but always on the prowl for blood. He smelled it, he sought it, he needed it. The steppe had sired him, and the steppe shaped him into the bastard the whole world would later fear.

Brothers on the steppe are not brothers. They are competitors, thugs, sometimes allies, mostly enemies. Everyone shares the same stinking pot of meat, but everyone knows: the next spoonful could be smashed out of your hand with a knife. Blood ties only count until one of you gets hungry. And you get hungry here every damn day.

Attila grew up with brothers and cousins, but none of them were lifelong friends. They fought, robbed each other's loot, and spat in each other's faces. And when one fell into the dirt, the other kicked him back. There was no love. There was only respect—and that came when you didn't break down. Those who were weak disappeared. Period. No condolences, no funeral. Just another pile of bones for the dogs to chew on.

Knives were always with you. None of those little bastards went around without one. A knife was like an extra finger. You needed it for cutting meat, for carving arrows, for slitting throats if someone got too loud. Knives made you a man before you even had a hair on your sack. And everyone knew: Your brother could wake up in the night with a knife in your chest if you got in his way too much.

Attila learned early on to sleep with a knife. He wrapped his arm around it so tightly that it already had blisters, but at least no one could take it away from him. Sometimes he woke up because someone tried to pull it from his fingers. Then there was blood. No hesitation, no arguing. Knife in, knife out. In the morning, everyone acted as if nothing had happened, and there was one less person sitting by the fire. That's how family worked.

Mistrust was like water here. You needed it to survive. Every look, every laugh, every word could be a trap. Brothers smiled in your face and held a sword behind your back. Friendship was a fairy tale that might work in Rome, but not on the steppe. Here, friendship meant: I won't kill you today, maybe tomorrow.

Attila was better at it than anyone else. He was small, but he had eyes like two nails. He saw when someone was lying, when someone was hungry, when someone was hesitating. He knew when a brother was weak, and that's exactly when he used the knife. He didn't wait for betrayal—he was the betrayal. He would rather stab first than risk being the idiot who gets slashed in his sleep.

There was one night when they were all sitting in a circle, children barely ten years old. They were chewing on a goat's leg that was already half-rotten. One of his cousins wanted the last piece. Attila let him grab it, smiled, and rammed the knife through his hand into the bone. Not a word, not a scream. Just a look:

"It's mine." The cousin pulled his hand back, bleeding like a pig, and Attila continued chewing. From then on, no one touched his rations.

This is how you learn to become king. Not through education, not through wisdom, but through constant fights with your own brothers. Every day a battle. Every day the question: Who will survive? And Attila always survived. Not because he was stronger—he wasn't at first. But he was tougher. He was the bastard who always got back up, who stabbed back, who laughed when he bled.

The steppe knows no childhood. It only knows training in the dirt. Brothers are not playmates. They are knives with faces. And if you survive that, if you grow up with them, you'll grow up not among flowers, but among blades. Attila learned that before he even knew how to pronounce his name.

That made him what he became: a man who trusted no one, who always had a knife in his hand, even when he was smiling. Brothers, knives, mistrust—that was his upbringing. No teacher, no priest. Only blood in the sand and bones beneath his feet.

On the steppe, there are no coins, no gold, no fine contracts with seals. The only exchange that counts here is blood. Blood is currency, blood is IOU, blood is credit. Anyone unwilling to pay or accept it is as poor as a dog and will die just as quickly.

Attila learned that early on. Food was always scarce. A piece of meat was worth more than any ring. But you only got that meat if you shed blood for it. Either your own or someone else's. A cut on your arm to show you were ready. A cut on someone else's neck to show you were stronger. That's how business worked on the steppe.

Blood was the proof. Anyone could talk big, anyone could say, "I fight, I kill, I take." But blood doesn't lie. Blood drips, blood stinks, blood remains in the dirt. It is the only testimony the steppe accepts. No paper, no signature—only the red stain that says: This is where payment was made.

Children traded blood like other children traded marbles. "Give me your knife." - "Cut yourself first." - Bang, a cut on the palm, drops on the floor, and the deal was done. No blood? No deal. And heaven forbid you tried to fake it, with animal blood or water. Then you'd immediately stick the knife in deeper until everyone was sure it was real.

Attila quickly understood: whoever circulated more blood won. He cut himself when necessary. He cut others when he wanted to. He showed that he was always willing to pay—but also that he always took. Even as a child, he had scars on his arms, more than other men. Every scar a contract, every hole in his skin a proof: I belong, I pay, I take.

And he was happy to take. He wasn't a collector of gold, a hoarder of things. Things break, get lost, burn. Not blood. Blood was always there, in every body, in every throat. You just had to hit the right spot. Simple, cheap, effective. Attila made it his business.

Once, he was arguing with an older boy over a horse. The other boy said, "Prove you can pay." Attila grinned, cut his thigh so deeply that the blood flowed like a small river. Then he grabbed the other boy by the neck, pushed his face into it, and said, "See? Enough blood for two." The boy swallowed, choked, and from then on, the horse belonged to Attila. Blood paid for.

The ancients said, "Blood is life." But they didn't say it as a spell for gods or healing. They said it as a balance sheet. The more blood you shed, the richer you are. Men with many dead were rich. They had invested blood, they had taken blood. Attila wanted to be the richest. Not in coins, not in land, but in the blood that clung to him.

He began seeking fights just to get more blood on the line. Every cut, every kick, every broken nose was a win. He didn't back down when someone attacked him. He always went forward. Better to lie in the dust with broken ribs than stay in the game bloodless. That's how he accumulated value, that's how he bought respect.

Blood was also punishment. If someone lied, there was no trial, no judge. They were cut. Either they survived and thus paid their debt, or they bled to death, and the debt was paid off. Simple, clean, effective. Attila quickly became the one who cut, not the one being cut. He was the one who decided how much blood was enough.

And women? Blood was considered currency there, too. If you wanted a woman, you had to show that you were paying. Sometimes your own, sometimes the blood of a rival. The more blood flowed, the more the woman was worth. No poems, no gifts. Only: "Do you see how much I shed for this?" Attila did that often. And sometimes he let the rival bleed to death next to the woman, just to show: I paid more.

Blood in the dust, blood on the hands, blood on the lips—that was the market of the steppe. And Attila traded like a pro. He knew that blood always wins. You can lose coins, but if you slit someone's throat, everything is yours.

That's how he grew up: in a world where your worth is measured not in silver, but in scars. And he collected scars like other men collect rings. Every cut a win. Every death a bank statement.

In the end, it was clear: Those rich in blood don't need gold. And even as a boy, Attila was richer than everyone else.

Women on the steppe are not queens, not goddesses, not muses for songs. They are shadows in the tent. They are there because they have to be, not because anyone actually sees them. Men ride, fight, and drink. Women crouch in the furs, give birth, cook, bleed, and if they're unlucky, they are kicked, dragged, or sold like a piece of meat.

Attila saw this from the beginning. His mother wasn't a gentle creature who told him stories. She was a shadow who brought food, gave him milk, maybe even laid a piece of fur over him—and that was it. Talking was rare, smiling even rarer. Women didn't laugh on the steppe. They screamed during childbirth, they moaned in the dust, and they fell silent as soon as the men arrived.

The tents were full of them, shadows that moved when needed. They mended clothes, rubbed horses with fat, kneaded dough with hands covered in cracks and scabs. They talked quietly to each other when the men were gone, but as soon as a Hun poked his head in, they were silent as stones. Shadows don't talk to warriors; shadows wait until they're alone again.

For men, women were booty. A victory without women was no victory. You could capture ten barrels of mead, a hundred horses, and gold until you were sick—but if there was no woman present, the men wouldn't grin. Women were trophies. Not because they were loved, but because they were used. A tent without a woman was as empty as a jug without mead.

Attila learned this before he was even old enough to take one himself. He saw how men pulled women into the tent, how they screamed, how they cried, how they were silent afterward. He saw how they were passed around like objects, as gifts, as rewards, as currency. A horse for a woman, a knife for a woman, a jug of mead for a woman. No distinction between cattle and meat.

And the women knew it. They had no dream of freedom, no dream of love. They only had the dream of not being the next to be left in the dust. Some became hard, vicious, and struck back when they were tormented too much. But they, too, were broken. A shadow that showed too much light was quickly crushed.

Attila didn't see them as people. For him, they were part of the game. Like horses, like weapons, like prey. He took what he wanted, and when he was tired of it, he dropped it. Women were like shadows in a tent—they were there, they moved, but they didn't count. No song, no poem, no name remained. Only shadows.

But he learned something from them: patience. Women on the steppe were masters of patience. They waited. They could sit for hours, silent, like rocks. Men raged, screamed, beat, rode through the smoke. Women remained silent, waited, survived. Attila understood: patience is a weapon. Not screaming, not hitting, but silence. The silence that waits until the right moment comes.

Perhaps he took that from them. He wasn't an impulsive idiot. Yes, he hit, he killed, he laughed. But he also knew when to be silent. When to wait. Like the shadows in the tent. Only he didn't turn it into submission, but into power.

The women gave birth to children, many children, and many died. The steppe was no place for lullabies. A child was a risk, a weight that slowed you down. But without children, there was no people. So the women squeezed their bodies, again and again, until they broke. Shadows that brought new shadows into the world. Attila was one of them.

And yet—valueless as they were—women were irreplaceable. Without them, there would be no food, no offspring, no tents, no warmth at night. The Huns acted as if they were nothing. But without them, they would be nothing at all. Perhaps they knew this deep down, but they never admitted it.

To Attila, they were chess pieces. Shadows to be moved when it was useful. No love, no respect, only utility. And that was precisely why he was able to treat them so coldly later on. He had never learned to see them any differently. They were shadows in the tent, and he was the fire outside that determined how long they would live.

Childhood on the steppe didn't smell of milk and honey. It smelled of sweat, wine, and blood. When the sun burned, it didn't just burn their backs, it burned their heads. The men sweated like horses, and the stench hung over the tents

like a thick cloud. In the evenings, they drowned the day in mead, a cheap, stinking brew that tasted more like sheep pee than grapes. And when the alcohol flowed, so did their fists.

Attila didn't grow up with stories, but with fights. Every night there was a row. Men who had drunk too much shouted, grabbed knives, and beat their fists until their teeth were in the dust. No feast ended without broken jaws, no celebration without blood in the dirt. And the children stood by, staring, laughing, sometimes even getting involved themselves. Thus, Attila learned that wine doesn't make you drunk—wine makes you angry. And anger is the only religion that counts on the steppe.

Sweat dripped from the men as they fought, as they rode, as they fucked. Everything was sweat. It was the stench of the steppe, the sticky film on the skin that never went away. Attila smelled it everywhere. In the heat, in the cold, even while sleeping. Sweat was like second blood. It flowed from every body, voluntarily or not.

Wine wasn't a luxury item. Wine was a weapon. It made men brave, made them stupid, turned them into animals. And animals were dangerous on the steppe. Attila saw drunken men kill brothers, rape women, slaughter horses, just because they wanted one more bowl. The next morning didn't matter. No one apologized. No one remembered. All that mattered was the moment, and in that moment, wine ruled.

Broken jaws were like currency. Everyone in the camp had facial scars, missing teeth, and crooked noses. Everyone knew: Anyone with a full jaw hadn't lived long enough. Attila himself received his first blows early on. He laughed when blood ran down his throat. Others cried when they received punches. He laughed. That was the difference.

There were evenings when they all sat in a circle, sweat and wine in the air, and the mood shifted from brotherly drinking to a mass of madness within a minute. One man sang, one laughed, one spat – and suddenly three men lay in the dust, one unconscious, one dead, one with a broken nose. That wasn't a drama. That was everyday life. The next day, they rode on together as if nothing had happened. Only the dead man was missing.

Attila absorbed it all. He absorbed the sweat, the wine, the blows. He learned that life was nothing but a constant fight, and that you have to laugh when your teeth fall out. He who cries is finished. He who laughs remains king.

Sometimes he would fight with his brothers just because he was bored. A punch, a kick, a knife stab—it didn't matter. In the end, they both laughed, or one of them just lay still. And that was school. No books, no teachers, just fists, wine, and blood. Attila learned faster than everyone else because he understood: It's not about winning. It's about surviving. You can lie in the dust a hundred times, but as long as you stand up and grin, you're invincible.

Sweat, wine, and broken jaws—that was the music of his youth. No singing, no harps, no damned trumpets like in Rome. Just the panting of men, the gurgling of mead, the cracking of bones. A symphony of dirt. And Attila was the conductor, even if he didn't know it at the time.

That's how he grew up: not with love, not with stories, but with fights, booze, and blood. And that's exactly what made him the bastard the world would later fear.

## Brothers, knives, mistrust

Blood doesn't make you a brother. Knives don't make you an enemy. On the steppe, all of this blurs, like dust in the wind. Brothers share flesh, and the next moment they share a blade. Family isn't a warm fire, but a cold dagger you feel in your back at night. Attila grew up with this knowledge, like other children with lullabies. His cradle was a dung heap, his bedtime story the sound of a knife cutting through flesh.

The steppe was full of brothers. Brothers who had drunk the same milk, brothers who shared the same tent, brothers who cursed the same father because he was either dead or drunk. But none of these brothers meant safety. Brothers were competitors. Brothers were like dogs fighting over the same bone while the flies were already on it.

Knives were the only thing you could rely on. A knife was more honest than any brother. A knife didn't lie. It was sharp or blunt. It cut or broke. It decided in a second who would still be alive tomorrow and who would lie in the dust as fodder. Attila learned early to love his knife like a brother—no, more. Because the knife never betrayed him. It was cold, silent, loyal. Everything a true brother never was.

Distrust wasn't a mistake, it was survival. Those who trusted died. It was that simple. Anyone who thought they could claim their life's worth in blood

eventually ended up lying in the grass with their throat slit. Trust was a Roman fairy tale that had no place on the steppe. On the steppe, trust meant: You forgot to hold your knife in your hand while you slept. And that was the end of you.

Attila slept with the knife under his skin as if it were a bone. He never let go. Even when he was drunk, even in his dreams, his hand rested on the hilt. Brothers, cousins, friends—no one was allowed to come near. Anyone could be the next to ram it into his back. And he was always ready.

He quickly learned that brothers aren't bound by love, but by fear. Fear that the other is faster. Fear that the other will betray you. And in this fear, he grew strong. While others were still trying to build friendships, he built walls of blades. Every step, every look, every gesture was a test. Those who hesitated lost. Those who smiled too broadly had something to hide. Those who remained silent were dangerous.

This was the world Attila grew up in: a constant competition between brothers, knives, and mistrust. A king doesn't grow up with love. A king grows by fearing everyone around him—and becoming stronger than their fear.

Childhood on the steppe wasn't a shitty playground with flowers, swings, and a mother calling out that dinner was ready. Childhood on the steppe was a bloody competition. Games didn't mean wooden swords and skipping, but real knives, real fists, and real blood. The camp was the arena, and every little bastard wanted to prove he was more capable than the next.

The games began harmlessly: who could stay on the horse longer, who could run faster through the dust, who could draw the bow further. But harmlessness never lasted long. Stumbling turned into beatings, beatings turned into stabbings, and before you know it, someone is lying gasping in the dust. No one called it murder. No one called it misfortune. It was a game—and games have losers.

Attila was right in the middle of it all. Small, wiry, with eyes that even then said, "I'll take what I want." He often fell, but he always got back up. And when he bled, he laughed. That made him dangerous. The other children cried when they split a lip. Attila spat blood and demanded the next round. He quickly understood: blood wasn't a sign of weakness; blood was your ticket. Without blood, you didn't belong.

The most popular games were the knife duels. Two boys, one knife, a circle in the dust. Whoever got out first lost. Whoever fell first lost. Sometimes "losing" also meant never getting up again. But that didn't matter. Everyone wanted in, everyone wanted to show they had more courage, more anger, more blood. Attila always went in. He never hesitated. Even if he was smaller, even if the other was stronger – he went in, grinned, and waited for his chance to stab.

And he was lucky, or maybe it wasn't luck, but that damned coldness inside him. He always hit the right spots. Small stabs, quick stabs. He didn't have to kill anyone right away; a cut was enough, a drop of blood, and the crowd cheered. But sometimes he did kill them anyway. And no one held it against him. The old men shrugged: "That boy's got it." End of story.

Other games were even more perverse. They tied dogs together, had them torn to pieces, and the children bet on which one would win. Sometimes they jumped in themselves, just to be bitten by the dogs, as a test of courage. Attila jumped more often than anyone else. He let them bite his arm, kicked the dog in the ribs, and screamed, "I'm still alive!" He was addicted to proving that he was tougher than the rest.

The women? They looked away. They knew it was normal. A boy without scars, without a broken nose, without a bite mark wasn't a real man. He was worthless. The steppe didn't like sissies. Attila grew up in this chaos like a fly in dung. He absorbed it, he bathed in it, he needed it.

Bloody games in the camp weren't just entertainment. They were training. Every cut, every blow prepared the boys for real life. If you didn't learn to laugh with pain here, the steppe would laugh at you—and eat you. Attila learned faster than everyone else. Not because he was stronger, but because he was tougher. Toughness isn't muscle. Toughness is when you can still laugh with a broken jaw.

Once, the old people told the story, he faced off against three older boys. They all tried to belittle him, the cheeky bastard with the black eyes. They threw him into the dust, kicked him until he could hardly breathe. But he got up. He spat blood, grabbed a stone, and struck down the biggest of them. The others fled. Attila stopped, grinning, covered in blood, and shouted, "Who else wants it?" Not a single child called back. That was the moment they all knew: The little one is not a victim. The little one is poison.

Bloody games shaped him. They made him a bastard who knew no fear. Fear was for the weak, for the Romans who needed walls. On the steppe, fear was

just another dog growling at you. And Attila kicked that dog in the face every time.

Betrayal on the steppe has no particular sound, no drumming, no fanfare. Betrayal is silent, like a knife cutting through flesh. You don't notice it until it's already too late. Then all you taste is blood in your mouth and you think: Shit, that's it.

Attila learned early on what betrayal tastes like. Iron, dust, sweat. Once, he shared a piece of meat with an older cousin. They both chewed, both grinned, both acted like brothers. Then, without warning, the cousin punched him in the face, ripped the meat away, and laughed. Attila lay in the dust, blood in his mouth, tasting betrayal like a damned spice. He swore to himself that he would never sit there so stupidly again.

Betrayal was no exception. Betrayal was the rule. Every Hun was a bastard with a hungry stomach and greedy eyes. A brother could help you, a brother could stab you in the back—often on the same day. Trust was like water in sand: It vanished as soon as you thought you had it. Attila knew this and made it his religion: Trust no one. Not your mother, not your brother, not the woman in the tent. Only your knife and your horse. Everything else is betrayal.

It wasn't just meat, not just petty theft. Betrayal ran deeper. Men sold their own brothers for a jug of mead. One whispered in the enemy's ear just to get an extra piece of bread. Women went into the tent with the victor and laughed at the man who only yesterday thought they were loyal. The steppe was a marketplace of betrayal. And everyone paid with blood.

Attila tasted it again and again. Once, he trusted a friend who promised to take the watch while Attila slept. When he woke up, his knife was missing, and the friend laughed with the others. Attila took a new knife, waited three nights—and slit the bastard's throat while he slept. Betrayal doesn't just taste like blood; it tastes sweet when you pay it back.

He learned that betrayal doesn't hurt when you expect it. Pain only came when you still had hope. So he shut down hope. No brother, no friend, no vows. Only deals. Today you fight beside me, tomorrow maybe against me. Screw it. The main thing is that you know: If you betray me, I'll be faster.

The taste of betrayal burned into him. He could smell it everywhere. In the laughter of men, in the silence of women, in the neighing of horses. Everyone breathed it, everyone lived with it. The steppe was betrayal, nothing else. And

Attila became its mirror. He was the betrayal before the others could play him out. He stung first, he laughed first, he broke first. And that's precisely why he survived.

Sometimes, when he lay in the dust, blood in his mouth, he would experience that metallic taste. He swallowed it, grinned, and stood up again. Betrayal became his everyday life, his breakfast, his dinner. He ate it, he drank it, he lived it. And eventually, he himself became the taste. Bitter, cold, inescapable.

Thus, a boy who once lost a piece of meat became the man who would betray entire empires. Attila was no hero, no loyal brother, no friend. He was betrayal personified. And the world would taste it many times to come – cold, bloody, and final.

In Rome, they talk about brotherhood, about solidarity, about family bonds stronger than iron. On the steppe, you laugh at such nonsense. Brothers are only brothers as long as they can ride their horses and hold their spears. As soon as one falls, he's nothing more than a piece of meat for the dogs to snatch.

Attila saw this early on. He saw brothers die—not in great battles, but in the dirt, in drunkenness, in petty quarrels over a piece of meat or a sip of mead. They lay there, gasping, bleeding, and no one cried. No one lifted them up. Perhaps they were stepped on, spat in their faces, and then they moved on. That was brotherhood on the steppe: a punch in the mouth before you die.

Once, one of his cousins fell from his horse, mid-ride. The animal had misjudged the situation, a hole in the ground, one wrong step – and the boy lay in the dust with a broken leg. The others rode on. No one stopped. No "Shit, we have to get him." Just dust settling over him. By evening, he was dead, devoured by wolves. Attila saw it and realized: No one will help you here. If you fall, you're alone.

It was even worse when brothers fell by brothers. Knives in the back, spears in the stomach, all within their own camp. Attila learned that family blood spurts just as warmly as that of enemies. And he learned that it makes no difference. A brother is just an enemy who speaks the same dialect.

When brothers fall, some laugh. They say, "He was weak." Or, "He deserved it." Sometimes there aren't even words. Just a shrug. On the steppe, brothers disappear faster than horse droppings in the grass. And no one remembers them for long. A name, a shadow, a bone in the dirt—that's all.

Attila had no illusions. He knew that one day he too would fall if he wasn't tougher, faster, more merciless. Having brothers didn't mean you were protected. Having brothers only meant you had more people who could betray you.

That's why he always struck first. If he saw a brother weakening, he kicked him. If someone doubted, he spat in his face. If someone laughed too much, he cut the fun out of him. Toughness was the only insurance. Pity was a knife you stabbed yourself in the stomach.

He learned that brothers who fall aren't a warning—they're a promise. A promise that if you're not careful, you'll be next. And Attila always paid attention. He slept with a knife in his arm, he never laughed too loudly, he never drank so much he couldn't stab. He was the bastard who learned that falling isn't an option.

The steppe knew no grave. Brothers fell, and the wind took their bones. No cross, no song, no damned prayer. Only dogs, flies, and dust. That was the legacy of the brothers who weren't tough enough. And Attila swore to himself that he wouldn't be one of them.

When brothers fall, nothing remains. No memory, no love, no legacy. Just another shadow in the dust. Attila stepped over these shadows, day after day. And he learned: A king doesn't grow by protecting brothers. A king grows by being the last one standing when all have fallen.

On the steppe, there are no sacred vows, no eternal bonds, no "brothers until death" bullshit. Here, there is only steel. Your knife, your spear, your bow. Everything else is air, smoke, and dirt. Trust is a fairy tale for children and Romans. Anyone who trusts here will die faster than they can wipe their ass.

Attila learned this before he even had his first beard. He saw men swear they were brothers, only to stab each other in the ribs hours later while drunk. He saw a father slit his son's throat for cheating at dice. He saw cousins riding side by side suddenly fight over a horse, leaving one of them dead. And every time, the same realization: Words are bullshit. Steel is truth.

No trust, only steel. That became Attila's fundamental law. He trusted no one, not even himself when he'd drunk too much. He slept with a knife in his hand, he never spoke more than necessary, he only laughed when it hurt. Everything else was show, deception, deceit. The steppe is a mass of shadows devouring each other. Only steel cuts through.

Steel was cold, honest, reliable. He didn't make speeches, he didn't make promises. He lay in your hand, and when you needed him, he cut. Attila didn't fall in love with women, he fell in love with steel. Knives, spears, blades—that was his family. Brothers betray you, steel doesn't.

And he knew: everyone else thought the same way. That's why the steppe was a place without trust. Everyone grinned, everyone acted like you were their brother, but everyone had a blade behind their back. So there was only one thing left: always be faster. Always the first to strike, always the one who laughs when the others are still thinking. No trust, only steel – that was the only law that survived on the steppe.

Sometimes he sat there, still young, his face still covered in dust and scabs, and watched the old men. They drank, they babbled, they told stories of heroic deeds, but he knew: All lies. None of them was a hero. Each of them had betrayed brothers, sold wives, and killed friends. And each was only alive because he had stabbed faster than the others. Attila absorbed this. He thought: If I become king, it will not be through loyalty, not through love, but through steel.

This made him dangerous. While others still believed in brotherhood, he had long since realized that it didn't exist. Everyone was their own enemy, and Attila made himself the worst enemy of all. He became the bastard who laughed when he stabbed, who grinned when there was blood in his mouth, who never hesitated when someone offered him a hand. Hands were traps. Steel was salvation.

No trust, only steel – that was the conclusion of his childhood. A boy who played with bones, who saw brothers fall, who ate betrayal like bread, who learned while drunk that a slap in the face is more honest than any promise. He didn't grow up, he hardened. He didn't become a man, he became a blade.

And so he stood there, not yet a king, not yet a ruler, just a bastard in the dust—but already tougher than most men twice his age. No trust, just steel. And the steel was ready to eat its way through the entire world.

## Blood as currency

In Rome they count coins, on the steppe they count scars. Gold only shines until someone comes along and plucks it from your fingers. But blood remains. It sticks to you, it stinks, it dries, and everyone can see that you've paid. Blood is the only currency worth anything here. No deal, no agreement, no promise is valid without it.

The Huns know this. Even children understand it, even before they understand what love or mercy is supposed to be. You want respect? Cut yourself. You want recognition? Let it drip. You want someone to listen to you? Then show them blood. Without blood, you're a beggar; with blood, you're a king. So simple, so damn brutal.

Attila inhaled this truth like smoke. He was young, he was small, but he knew: If he had more blood in the game than the others, then everything would be his. Blood was his capital, and he invested like a madman. Every fight, every scar, every broken fist was a deposit into his account. And he didn't do things by halves. When he gave blood, he gave it deeply. When he took blood, he took it all.

The games in the camp weren't games; they were transactions. A knife stab in the hand meant: I've paid, I'm in. A cut in your brother's arm meant: He's paid, he owes me respect. Blood was the tax every Hun had to pay to even be part of the pack. Anyone who remained clean was suspect. Anyone without scars wasn't a man, but a coward, a mouse in the dust.

Attila made a name for himself because he wasn't afraid of this tax. He cut himself without hesitation. He let others cut without batting an eyelid. He laughed when the blood flowed. He knew: This isn't weakness, this is proof. Every drop was like a coin on the table. And he stacked it higher than the others.

It wasn't a bloodlust for the sake of bloodlust. It was calculated. Blood meant access, blood meant power. If you stood in the circle, the other men around you, and you were the only one without a red mark on his skin, then you were out. Attila made sure he was never that bastard. He always had fresh scars, always new marks. He showed: I invest more than you, I pay more, so more belongs to me.

On the steppe, blood was also punishment. No court, no judge, just steel and skin. Those who lied were cut. Those who stole were cut. Those who were

weak were cut. Blood settled everything. No arguments, no shouting, just a cut, and the matter was settled. Attila became a judge early on, knife in hand. He was the one who decided how deep the cut needed to be.

So he grew up in an economy that didn't recognize the price of gold, only the price of meat. Every scratch was a contract. Every scar was a bank statement. Every death was a closed deal. Blood flowed, and the steppe absorbed it like an accountant, noting everything.

Attila knew: Those rich in blood don't need gold. Gold can be stolen from you, but blood? Blood belongs to you until you die. It's the only possession no one can take from you. So he always paid, paid gladly, paid a lot. Blood as currency, and he was the richest boy in the camp.

A contract on the steppe isn't a piece of parchment with seals and pompous words. A contract on the steppe is a cut. Skin is cut, blood is drawn, and the deal is sealed. No notary, no priest, no emperor with a golden pen. Only steel and flesh. Those who refuse have already lost before they begin.

The Huns had their own rituals. Two men sit opposite each other, their knives drawn. No smiles, no handshakes. They rip up their sleeves, baring their skin. One makes the first cut, the other must follow. Drops fall into the dust, sometimes they rub their hands together to mix the blood. And that was the contract. It's done. No reversal, no going back. Blood doesn't lie.

Children learned the same thing. They formed blood brotherhoods not out of romance, but out of necessity. "You help me with the horse, I'll help you with the meat." – Bang, cut in the palm, bloodstain, contract. But everyone knew: It only lasts as long as it lasts. When meat became scarce, when hunger grew stronger, then even this contract was only worth as much as the next blade.

Attila loved these rituals. Not because he believed in brotherhood, but because he knew that cuts were power. Every cut was proof. Every cut was a stamp that said, "I paid." He cut himself deeper than the others, made it bleed more, just to show: I invest more. The scars on his arms were like the seals of a bank that knows no end.

And he understood early on the weakness in this system. If all cuts were considered contracts, they could be abused. Attila cut himself off with many—brothers, cousins, men from other camps. But he always laughed inside. He knew: The cut binds you, not me. You think we're brothers? Shit, we're only

brothers as long as it suits me. When push comes to shove, your cut will only reveal your weakness, not my loyalty.

Once, he made such a deal with an older warrior. The man wanted Attila to look after a horse for him, in return for Attila's bow and arrows. They made the deal, blood dripped, and the deal was sealed. Attila looked after the horse—but he also took the arrows and bow, keeping the animal as well. When the warrior protested, Attila laughed in his face: "You made the deal, not me." The warrior reached for the knife, but Attila was faster. Another cut, this time deeper, this time final. The deal was fulfilled—with blood.

That's how it worked. Every cut was a word, and words on the steppe were as sharp as blades. The more cuts you had, the more stories you carried on your skin. Some looked like maps, lines that crossed, scars that told stories. "This was a contract with my brother." - "This was a trade for a horse." - "This was the cut that didn't heal because the bastard betrayed me."

Blood wasn't a romantic symbol. Blood was accounting. Everyone knew exactly how many drops they had already paid and how many they still owed. Debts meant wounds that never healed. And Attila made sure no one ever reminded him of his debts. If someone came along and said, "You still owe me," he got the blade. Contract ended, debt paid.

The cuts were also tests. Anyone who didn't make the cut was out. There were no excuses. "I don't want to bleed." - "I'm afraid of scars." - That was the same as "I want to die." Attila cut himself every time without flinching. Even when he was already weak, even when he barely had any blood left in his body. He showed that he could still pay. That made him untouchable.

Cuts as contracts – that was the law of the steppe. No paper, no gold, no god. Only skin that tears open and blood that stains the dust. Attila didn't write his history with words. He wrote it with scars. And he knew: This writing was more honest than any Roman song, more honest than any priest's promise. Steel does not lie. Skin does not forget. Blood pays for everything.

Gold only glitters for idiots. Coins only clink in the hands of those too cowardly to get their hands dirty. On the steppe, gold is laughed at. You can't eat it, you can't feed a horse with it, and it won't keep a knife away from your throat. But scars? Scars are wealth. Every scar is proof that you paid, that you survived, that you're worth more than the bastard next to you.

Attila understood this faster than most. He didn't wear his scars as shame, he wore them like jewelry. Where other men had chains around their necks, he had lines down his arms. Where Romans showed off their rings and signet rings, he showed a chest full of notches. Scars weren't flaws; scars were trophies, tickets, coins that never rusted.

Even as a boy, he had more than others. A cut here, a bite wound there, arrow wounds, knife stabs, even scrapes that never fully healed. He laughed when others looked at him. They saw a boy full of cracks—he saw an account full of deposits. Every scar told a story: I was there, I paid, I survived.

In the tents, the men didn't talk about gold, but about scars. "Do you see this? This was when we attacked the Romans." - "This is from my own brother, who stabbed me in the stomach." - "This is from the night the wolves hunted us." Every scar was a chapter, every scar a contract, every scar a currency. Those who didn't have one were worthless.

Attila played this game better than anyone else. He collected scars like a stingy bastard hoards coins. He almost sought them out. He entered fights he didn't have to fight, just to have the proof. He grinned when he bled, because he knew: That's capital. And he had more of it than the other children, more than many men. Even as a teenager, he looked like an old warrior. And that made him dangerous.

For wealth in scars means power. Whoever bears more scars paid more. Whoever paid more may take more. That was the law. No one doubted it. A man without scars could own a hundred horses, and yet they laughed at him. A man covered in scars could stand naked in the dust, and they would give him meat and wine. Attila was that man. He needed no jewelry. His body was the treasure.

But scars weren't just status symbols. They were also warnings. Every line said, "I've survived worse." Every cut screamed, "You won't break me." When you looked at Attila, you didn't see a boy; you saw a book full of threats. He didn't have to talk much. His skin did the talking for him.

And he understood how to use that. If someone challenged him, all he had to do was pull up his shirt, show his scars, and the other would swallow. He didn't always have to fight. His skin fought for him. He was rich, and everyone could see it.

Of course, that also came at a price. Every scar meant pain. Every scar was a day in the dust, a cut, a gasp, a struggle to breathe. But Attila took it in stride. Pain was interest. Pain was the tax you paid to become rich. And he was happy to pay. The more it hurt, the more he knew: I have become richer.

The Romans never understood this. For them, a scar was a flaw. Something to be hidden. They painted perfume on their faces and wore helmets to die beautifully. Attila laughed about it. For him, every scar was a slap in the face to the Romans. Proof that he was worth more because he was paying while they counted their coins.

Wealth in scars—that was the balance sheet of the steppe. No account, no bank, no god, just burning skin and flowing blood. Attila kept this account like a madman. And in the end, he had more than anyone else. More scars, more evidence, more wealth. He was no longer a boy; he was a walking treasure of flesh and pain.

Gold is slow. You have to count it, weigh it, stuff it into bags, carry it over, guard it. Gold makes you heavy, gold makes you lazy, gold makes you a target. Blood, on the other hand, is direct. One cut, one scream, one stain in the dust—and the debt is paid. No receipt, no witnesses, no stupid clerks with pens. Blood pays immediately.

The Huns laughed at merchants who arrived with coins. Merchants thought they had power because their pockets clinked. But what good is a pocket full of coins if a Hun slits your throat and lets you bleed to death? Coins roll away, blood remains. Blood sticks, blood screams. You can lose gold, but you only lose blood once.

Attila learned early on that gold was just dust on the steppe. He saw men holding up gold coins as if they were gods. But when hunger struck, they didn't eat their coins; they gnawed the leather of their boots. When winter came, no gold warmed them. But blood—blood could always be used. Blood could be drunk when times got tough. Blood could be shed to buy fear. Blood was the faster currency, the more honest, the more cruel.

In the camps, disputes were never settled with gold. Had someone stolen another's horse? No gold, no replacement. One cut, and the matter was settled. Had someone assaulted a woman who was already "taken"? No judge, no money. One cut, and the woman belonged to the stronger man. Blood cleared faster than any coin.

Attila made this his philosophy. He never said, "I'll pay you back." He said, "I'll cut you." And that was enough. Everyone knew he was serious. Gold had to be collected, counted, and tested. Blood could be shown immediately. His own drops or yours—he was flexible.

Once, a merchant came into the camp, laden with coins, fabrics, and jewelry. He thought he could make an impression. Attila, still young, stepped in front of him, cut his hand, and let the blood drip onto the ground. Then he looked at the merchant and said, "Payment enough." The merchant protested, waving his gold coins. Attila just grinned, grabbed him by the throat, and cut him open. His blood ran into the dust, and Attila said, "Now it's double payment."

That's how it worked. Blood was always faster, always more direct, always more convincing. It left no room for negotiation. You can argue about prices, about quantities, about coins. But when you're lying in the dust and your blood is spurting, there's nothing left to say. Blood is the end of any discussion.

And that made the Huns so dangerous. Romans wanted to trade, negotiate, and make treaties. The Huns made treaties with blades. One cut, and the city belonged to them. One cut, and the woman changed hands. One cut, and the dispute was over. Quick, dirty, and final.

Attila saw this and absorbed it. He learned that speed is everything. Don't wait, don't count, don't hope. Act. Pay with blood before the other person even knows he's in business. That made him unpredictable, that made him feared.

Blood pays faster than gold. That wasn't just a saying, it was the law of the steppe. Everyone knew it, everyone lived by it. And Attila was the one who perfected it. While others were still grasping for coins, he already had the knife in his flesh. While others were still searching for words, he had already delivered the payment. In blood.

The old men sat in their tents, drinking mead, chewing on pieces of meat, and belching out tales that stank of fame and lies. Each of them claimed to be rich—rich in booty, rich in horses, rich in women. But if you looked closely, they had hardly any teeth left in their mouths, their bones creaked when they stood up, and their scars were old, pale, stories of yesterday. They spoke of gold, of battles, of heroic deeds, but their blood had long been paid for and forgotten.

Attila, barely a teenager, was richer than all of them. Not in coins, not in jewelry, not in women—but in fresh cuts, in fresh blood, in scars that still burned. He didn't need old stories; he brought new ones. While the old men

boasted with words, he simply showed his skin. Lines, cracks, nicks—every cut a chapter, every scar a testament. He didn't have to lie; his body was his record.

The old people hated it. They saw this bastard, barely old enough to shit on his own, yet he'd already paid for more blood than they had in their last ten years. He was a walking bank robbery, a bank account that never emptied. And they knew: This boy would make them all obsolete. No song, no belch, no gold piece could compete with the scars that still oozed.

Attila grinned at their faces. He heard their stories, nodded, pretended to listen—but inside he was laughing. He knew: their time was over. They were old dogs who still barked but had long since stopped biting. He was the young wolf, hungry, greedy, full of blood. He was richer because he paid, while they were merely managing memories.

At night, when they sat around the fire, it was clear. One told of a battle against the Romans, of heads rolling. Attila simply lifted his shirt, revealing a fresh wound that hadn't even healed yet. Not a word, not a laugh, just a look: "That's my story, and it's from today." The old men fell silent, continued chewing, drank more, and tried to forget that a boy was outranking them.

This is how Attila became rich, not through trade, not through inheritance, but through a constant investment in blood. Every day was a deposit. Every fight, every game, every argument. He took nothing back, he spared nothing. He paid for everything immediately, in skin, in flesh, in pain. And he collected respect, fear, obedience.

The steppe had its own bank, and it was made of dust and bones. Attila was the only one who understood how to become truly rich in it. Not with horses, not with women, not with gold—but with fresh, steaming blood. He was the boy who was richer than the old. And that made him dangerous. Because someone who is richer at such a young age never stops paying.

Attila wasn't a man, he was a currency. He was living proof that blood was worth more than anything else. And he knew: as long as he kept paying, the whole damn world would be his.

## Women like shadows in the tent

Women on the steppe had no memorable names. They had no place in stories, no faces in songs. They were shadows in the tents, figures who appeared amidst the smoke and the stench of horses to press children, cook meat, and open their legs when a Hun wanted them to. Nothing more. No glamour, no myth, just shadows.

The men laughed, boasted, and beat their chests with their fists as if they were the gods of the earth. But without the shadows in the tent, they would have died like flies. Who would have cut the meat, mended the tents, and given birth to the children? But no Hun would admit that. Instead, they acted as if women were nothing more than cattle with breasts. Useful, but replaceable.

Attila grew up in this shadow. His mother was one of them—no angel, no centerpiece of a family, just a woman with tired eyes, chapped hands, and breasts that fed him until he could hold a knife himself. After that, she was air to him. A shadow that flitted through the tent, ignored. He saw her more often with her head bowed than with it held high. Women were invisible until they were needed.

And they were constantly needed. For children, for warmth, for a quick fuck in the dust. No Hun asked if they wanted it. Want was a word for Roman women who read poetry. Here, all that mattered was: She was there, she had a body, she could be used. If she was unlucky, by several people at once. If she was lucky, by a man who wasn't too drunk.

The women themselves knew they were shadows. They spoke quietly when the men were gone, sometimes even laughed when they were alone. But as soon as the horses' hooves approached, as soon as the men's voices bellowed, they became silent as stones. Shadows don't make noise; shadows know that too much light destroys them.

Attila saw his cousins drag the women into the tent, how they screamed, how they lay still afterward. He saw mothers grip their children with hard hands, because softness helped no one here. He saw women die without a word. Shadows disappear quietly. No song, no grave, no cross. Only dust settling over them.

For him, they weren't saints, not lovers, not figures to be worshipped. They were part of the equipment, like a saddle, like a knife, like a horse. Useful, but replaceable. No wonder he treated them so coldly later on. He had never

learned to see them differently. To him, they were shadows, to be moved when necessary and forgotten when they got in the way.

But he also saw what men overlooked: women had patience. They could wait. They could remain silent, observe, survive. Where men raged and died, women remained silent and stayed. Attila understood this. He absorbed it. He was not just the roaring beast like his brothers. He was also the shadow that waits, that bides its time, that grows stronger in silence. Perhaps that was the only lesson he learned from women: Patience.

But in the end, they remained what they were: shadows in the tent. No glory, no power, just quiet movements that disappeared amid sweat, blood, and smoke. And Attila grew up never believing they could be anything else.

Mothers on the steppe aren't saints with halos, no warm arms cradling you while they hum songs. Mothers on the steppe are dust that breathes. Dust that feeds you, forces you to your feet, and then leaves you alone. Anyone who expects a mother to love you has already lost. There's no time for love here. There's only survival.

Attila's mother was not a picture to be worshipped. She was a woman with chapped lips, rough hands, and eyes that had seen more death than a boy could bear. She held him to her breast as long as he needed milk, and then pushed him away. "Run," that meant. No smile, no caress. Only this silence, louder than any sermon. There are no nurseries on the steppe, only tents that stink of horse, blood, and smoke.

Mothers cooked meat when there was any. They mended hides, they carried children on their backs while they gathered wood. They screamed when they gave birth, they screamed when their children were taken away, and then they fell silent. Because screaming doesn't help. Because screaming only attracts the dogs. Women on the steppe were mothers of dust—they gave birth in the dirt and buried in the dirt, sometimes on the same day.

Attila watched his mother give birth and lose children. Some died in the womb, some after the first cry, some after a few winters. No priest spoke, no gravestone was erected. Only a few bones left in the dust. And the mother? She might cry briefly, alone, when no one was looking, and then get up again. Cooking, mending, giving birth, silence. That was the cycle.

For the Huns, this was normal. Women were childbearing machines. Their bodies were tools, their breasts were tubes. If one broke, another one was

used. There were always enough women. They were stolen, they were bought, they were simply taken. Mothers were not honored; they were used.

And yet, Attila knew he would never have survived without this mother of dust. She shoved meat into his hand when other children were starving. She once held a knife for him when he was too weak to grasp it himself. She pulled him up when he lay in the dust. But never with love. Never with tenderness. Always harsh, always silent, always as if she would rather push him away right away.

Maybe that was precisely the lesson. A mother on the steppe gives you nothing but what you absolutely need: food, milk, and strength. Everything else you have to get yourself. No praise, no pat on the back. If you come back with blood on your hands, she just shrugs. If you come back with a broken jaw, she softens your flesh so you'll chew anyway. Nothing more.

Attila learned early on: Mothers are not a refuge. They are dust that pushes you forward. And he loved them for that, in his own way. Not with his heart, not with words, but with the respect you give dust: You don't kick it away because you know it carries you.

Thus, women became mothers, mothers became dust, dust became memories. Shadows vomiting children into the world, raising them in dust, and then disappearing. Attila carried this image within him like a burn scar. He knew: He came from dust, and he would end up in dust. But he wouldn't disappear quietly like the mothers. He would burn, he would cut, he would spread his blood everywhere.

Women weren't people in the camp; they were commodities. They had the same value as a horse, a sack of grain, or a knife. They were traded, sold, lost at dice, stolen like other men stole furs. Anyone who had romantic ideas was an idiot. Love was a word for songs, not for the steppe.

The trade in women didn't operate like a market with tables and prices. It was dirtier, rawer. Two men argued, one dragged the woman into the tent, the other yelled. Instead of a fight, it became a deal: "You take my horse, I'll take the woman." - "Screw it, give me two knives, and she's yours." So simple. No paper, no contract, just blood and yelling.

Attila saw this all the time. Women were passed around like jugs of mead. Here today, there tomorrow, dead the day after. Some held on because they were tough, because they knew there was no point in fighting. Others broke quickly.

And those who did break ended up in the dust, forgotten, trampled on, dogs on their bones.

Once, Attila saw a man lose to a woman at dice. The bastard laughed, clapped his hands, took his knife, and sent her to the winner's tent. The woman? She didn't scream, she didn't cry. She simply walked away. As if she knew: she has no choice, never has. And Attila realized: that's the true price of the steppe. Women are coins that can walk, and they change hands like any other currency.

Sometimes the women themselves were part of the trade. They offered themselves to avoid the worst. "Take me, but spare my child." - "Take me, but let my brother live." Deals that never lasted long. The men took them, laughed, and the next day, their children and brothers were dead anyway. Trafficking in women wasn't a business; it was a lie, signed with sperm and blood.

Attila saw this and absorbed it. It was clear to him: women were not companions. They were resources. They could be used, traded, and squandered. And he played this game better than most. He knew when to give a woman away, when to take one, and when to destroy one. No feelings, no consideration. Only utility.

The ancients said it was tradition. The Huns had always treated women this way. Romans might have found it cruel, but what did they know? In Rome, they sat in baths, scrubbed their cocks, while their wives wrote poetry. Here, on the steppe, nothing was soft. Women were part of the war, part of the trade, part of the blood. No love, just shadows to be moved.

Attila quickly realized that trafficking in women also meant power. Those who had more women demonstrated their strength. Not because they loved them, but because they commanded more shadows under their roof. He didn't take women because he felt lustful—he could satisfy his lust anywhere. He took them because they were symbols. Signs that he could take whatever he wanted.

And the women? They learned to be shadows. Silent, obedient, invisible. Some whispered among themselves, planned, hoped. But most knew: hope is a trap. They waited until they were exchanged again. Shadows in the tent, coins in the game, meat in trade.

Attila grew up with it. For him, it was natural. He never asked why. He just saw: This is how it is, this is how it will stay. Trafficking in women in the camp was

like breathing. Everyone did it, no one talked about it. Shadows changed hands, and the steppe laughed.

The worst thing about the women on the steppe wasn't their screaming. Anyone could scream. Men screamed when they were dying, children screamed when they were hungry, horses screamed when they were driven too hard. Screaming was noise, and noise is part of the steppe. The worst thing about the women was their silence. Silent shadows are more dangerous than any knife.

Attila saw it in his mother, in the other women in the tent. They screamed during childbirth, screamed when the men grabbed them, screamed when they were beaten. But afterward, there was this silence. Not a word, not a sound. Only eyes that stared, as if they saw everything and forgot everything at once. This silence was worse than blood. It was like a mirror that said: "You are nothing. You are dust."

The men might have felt powerful when they silenced a woman. They thought they had won. But Attila realized that the silence was different. It wasn't defeat, it was survival. A shadow that remains silent is a shadow that remains. It waits. It doesn't pass. It hangs like smoke in the tent, like dust in the mouth, like a curse that no one speaks aloud.

Children sensed it. When the women fell silent, the entire tent was silent. Men could laugh, shout, and drink, but the women's silence weighed on everything. It was a weight no one could drink away. Attila hated it, but he also respected it. He understood: silence is a weapon, just like steel. Not loud, not flashing, but deadly slow.

The shadows knew more than they showed. They saw who was weak, who was sick, who was drunk. They sensed when a man would fall, even before he knew it. They said nothing; they waited. And when he had fallen, they were already there, ready to take the skins, the bones, the remains. Silence signified power, invisible power. Men boasted, women remained silent. In the end, the shadows remained.

Attila took this lesson with him. He raged, he laughed, he fought—but he could also wait. He could remain silent. While other men tore each other apart, he stood still, observed, and only struck when it was worth it. He had learned that from the shadows. Patience, silence, waiting. Not like a man, but like a woman surviving on the steppe.

But to the men, the women were just shadows. They didn't call them by name, they didn't summon them to the fire. They were there when they were needed and disappeared when they weren't. Shadows have no voices. Shadows leave no stories. Shadows disappear without anyone missing them.

Attila saw them disappear, day after day. One woman died in childbirth, another was killed in a fight, a third simply forgotten. No one spoke about it. Just one less shadow in the tent. Just one less silence. The steppe absorbed them, just as it absorbed everything—blood, bones, sweat, screams. In the end, only silence remained.

And this silence burned into Attila. He knew: The steppe will swallow me up someday, too. But I won't disappear quietly. I will scream, I will laugh, I will spit blood until the sky itself vomits. Shadows may remain silent, but Attila swore that his silence would only come when the world was already beneath his feet.

Tenderness was a word that didn't exist on the steppe. Perhaps the Romans knew it when they sprayed their wives with perfume and recited poems by heart. Perhaps peasants in Gaul sang love songs under some tree. But on the steppe, there was no room for such filth. Here, there was only sweat, blood, hunger, and the silence of the shadows.

When a Hun took a woman, it wasn't with a gentle hand. He grabbed, pulled, pushed. No kissing, no caressing. Just bodies slamming together like two horses in a storm. Afterward, he would turn over, fall asleep, or go back to drinking. No "I love you," no "You are my everything." The only words spoken were commands or curses. Everything else was weakness.

Attila grew up with this image. He saw men pulling women into the tent, how they moaned, how they fell silent. He never saw anyone gently stroke a woman's cheek, compliment her hair, or praise her eyes. Women weren't there to be loved. They were there to be used. Shadows in the tent that you could grab if you wanted, and then they would disappear again.

No one here would have understood tenderness. A man who brought a woman flowers would have been laughed at before he even handed them over. A man who kissed a woman without having sex with her would have been declared insane. Feelings were a flaw here, a weakness, a hole in the armor. The steppe doesn't tolerate holes.

And the women? They knew. They didn't expect affection. They didn't seek it. Perhaps they secretly dreamed of it when they were alone, perhaps they

whispered stories of gentle men to each other when the Huns were gone. But in the tent, in the dust, in everyday life, there was no room for it. Anyone who longed for more was destroyed more quickly.

Attila had no idea what love was, and he didn't want it. He saw women as shadows, useful, disposable, and transient. He took what he wanted and let go when he was satisfied. No thanks, no looking back. For him, that was normal. Feelings were a luxury, and luxury on the steppe is a death sentence.

The ancients said: "Tenderness makes soft, and the soft die." So there was no tenderness. Not in word, not in deed. Only harshness, only violence, only this constant reminder that everything here is transient. Attila absorbed this like smoke. And the older he grew, the clearer it became to him: If I become king, it will not be with love, not with tenderness, but with harshness, with blood, with the silence of the shadows.

That's what the steppe was like. That's what women were like. That's how Attila was formed: in a world where there was no room for tenderness. No smile, no kiss, no warm word. Only silent shadows, men who take, and blood that pays for everything.

## Sweat, wine and broken jaws

The steppe stinks of sweat, whether summer or winter. Men who haven't bathed in weeks, horses that fart their entrails almost in time, and tents that smell of smoke, semen, and meat scraps – that's the smell of everyday life. Sweat isn't a side effect; sweat is your second skin. Every breath tastes of it. It sticks to your ribs, it drips into your mouth, it settles over your eyes. And you get used to it, until you yourself stink of a stable.

And when sweat isn't enough, there's wine. Not noble grape juice like in Rome, but that fermented, sour crap that tastes more like vinegar than joy. It burns your throat, numbs your head, makes you slur, laugh, and lash out. Wine wasn't a drink—wine was flammable. A barrel in the camp meant: blood will flow today. Not because someone is looking for a fight, but because wine finds it.

The Huns didn't drink for fun. They drank to get angry. One sip, and the tongue lengthened. Two sips, and fists went up. Three sips, and knives flashed in the

firelight. The evening never ended with hugs. It ended with broken noses, knocked-out teeth, and jaws that cracked so loudly the dogs whined.

Attila absorbed it all. Even as a boy, wine was pressed into his hand as if it were water. He gulped it down, choked, vomited, and laughed while doing so. He learned that intoxication doesn't soften, but sharpens. Wine doesn't make men friendlier; it turns them into animals. And he realized: Those who stood their ground when drunk, those who laughed when drunk, were worth more than all others.

Thus, evenings in the camp became arenas. First laughter, then singing, then the first punches. A cough, a wrong word, a sideways glance – and a fist crashed into the face. Teeth flew, blood spurted, the crowd roared. The fire cast shadows over men bashing each other's skulls just to prove they were still alive.

Attila joined the fight early on. Not because he was strong, but because he was tougher. He fell, he bled, he got back up. Again and again. He grinned with blood-stained teeth, even if he had two fewer teeth. He knew: pain is currency, and the more you show that you can pay, the richer you become.

The steppe was no place for the faint-hearted. It was a bar without walls, a never-ending brawl. Sweat, wine, and broken jaws were the foundation of life. Every evening a test, every morning a hangover of blood and dust. And Attila passed every test because he didn't complain, but laughed. Laughter in pain—that was his superpower.

In Rome, they give speeches. They discuss, they philosophize, they spit words like birds spit. On the steppe, people laugh about it. Words are dust. Words don't hold when the wind blows. What holds is the fist. A fist is a sentence everyone understands, even drunk, even half-dead. A fist is honest. It is direct. It doesn't lie.

In the camp, every conversation sooner or later resulted in a blow. Two men sat, drank, laughed – and then a fist would come crashing down. No reason necessary, no insult, no argument. Just the need to show: I'm tougher than you. A bloody mouth was the only acceptable period at the end of a sentence on the steppe.

Attila learned early on that he had to control his tongue but sharpen his fists. Words won't get you far; fists will get you where you want to go. When he spoke, it was brief, concise, and often filthy. The rest ran through his hands. He

hit, and everyone understood. No translating, no explaining. A blow is a language everyone speaks.

The evenings around the fire were proof of this. First laughter, then fists, then knives. But the fists were always the beginning, the warm-up, the test. Those who stood their ground were respected. Those who fell were kicked until they were motionless. After that, they were gone. No long discussions. No second chances.

Attila loved that. He loved the honesty in one fell swoop. No pretense, no acting, no masks. Just bone against bone, flesh against flesh. He learned what a fist sounds like when it breaks teeth. He learned what dust tastes like when he lies face down in the dirt. And he learned how to get up, again and again, until the other guy couldn't anymore.

Fists made him famous. He wasn't the biggest, not the strongest, but he was the one who never stopped. He punched until his hands bled, and when they couldn't take any more, he bit. He was the bastard who was still standing when everyone else was down. That was worth more than words. Words disappear, fists leave scars.

The ancients said you have to be able to talk if you want to lead. Attila knew: Screw talking. When your fist talks, everyone listens. Louder, clearer, more honest. Words tire, fists wake you up. He wasn't a talker, he was a thug. And that made him a better leader.

Thus, the fist became currency, alongside blood and sweat. Every blow was proof, every broken nose a contract. Men don't remember sentences, they remember pain. And Attila wrote his sentences with fists, on faces that never forgot.

Drinking wasn't a hobby, it was a duty. Every Hun drank until he puked, and then he kept drinking. No party ended sober. Wine, mead, anything that burned and made one's head spin, was poured into people's mouths as if there were no tomorrow. And most of the time, there really wasn't—for someone in the camp. Drinking was the gateway through which the steppe fell into a frenzy.

Attila realized early on that drinking wasn't a pleasure. It wasn't a "fine drink" like the Romans, who raised their noses above their glasses and babbled poetic nonsense. Here, it was a competition. Whoever stood longer won. Whoever

puked and kept drinking won even more. Whoever fell over was the dog of the evening.

And with the booze came music. Not the music of the Romans with their lutes and flutes. Here, the music was made of bones. The cracking of ribs, the splintering of jaws, the smacking of fists on flesh. Added to that was the babbling, roaring, and howling of the drunks. A symphony of violence, played every night as soon as the fire was burning high enough.

Attila learned to love this music. He heard the cracking of a nose like others hear the sound of a drum. He heard the choking of a drunk like others hear a song. The steppe didn't sing, it beat. And the sounds were blood, sweat, and broken bones. Drunkenness was the conductor, violence the orchestra.

The men laughed when someone fell. They sang their off-key songs as blood dripped into the dust. One raised the jug, the other raised the knife. No one asked for reasons. Drinking was reason enough. Drinking was the god who stood above all.

Attila fell often, but he always got back up. That made him famous. Others puked and stayed there; he puked and laughed, wiped his mouth, and kept punching. He didn't get tired; he got harder. His bones played along, cracking to the beat, and he joined in the music. He wasn't a listener; he was part of the damn band.

So he grew up in a world where booze and bone music set the rhythm. No flutes, no harps, no songs of love. Only the roar of drunken throats, the splintering of bones, and the panting of men who drank too much, fought too much, and never had enough.

Attila realized: If you want to survive in this music, you can't just listen. You have to drum along, dance along, and play along. And he played until the steppe knew him. Drinking didn't make him weak—drinking made him invincible, because he laughed when others cried.

Teeth aren't a given on the steppe. Older people lose them anyway. But most lose them before then – in fights, they bite out of the skull like nails from rotten wood. Every blow to the mouth meant risk. Every evening ended with spitting, choking, blood, and often a tooth lying in the dirt.

The Huns didn't see this as a loss. They saw it as a gain. Every lost tooth was a trophy, proof that they had fought, that they had paid. Some collected their

knocked-out teeth in leather pouches and wore them around their necks, like other men in Rome displayed their rings. Every tooth was a chapter, every crack in the mouth a medal.

Attila laughed with a bloody grin whenever he lost a tooth. He didn't see weakness, he saw payment. A hole in his dentures was like a scar on his face: It showed that he was part of the game, that he wasn't just standing on the sidelines watching. Anyone with all their teeth in their mouth was suspect. They hadn't invested enough.

Nights around the fire were tooth hunts. Men fought until bones cracked, and in the morning the ground was littered with white splinters. Children picked them up like shells, threw them into the dust, and laughed. Dogs chewed on them as if they were bones. Teeth were everywhere, symbols of a currency everyone understood.

Attila sometimes picked them up, not to keep them, but to throw them back into the mouths of the losers. "Here, eat your gold," he growled, laughing as the man gasped in the dust. For him, teeth weren't sacred, something to be protected. They were coins you lost if you stayed in the game.

And the more gaps in the mouth, the more respect. Men with stumps of teeth were feared. They had proven that they had always gotten back up, even without teeth. They slurred their words and spat blood, but everyone listened. Their mouths were trophies, and no one laughed at them.

Attila knew: One day, he too would be toothless. But he wasn't worried. He knew his grin would then seem all the more dangerous – a mouth full of gaps, a face full of stories. Every missing tooth a victory, every scar a fortune.

Thus, the battle for the mouth became a playground of honor and violence. No dentist, no replacement, no pain-free life. Only blows, blood, and the white splinters lying in the dust like coins after a robbery. And Attila loved it. He grinned, even when he spat blood. He knew: Teeth are trophies, and he would collect more than anyone else.

Wine was no friend. It was a traitor, a bastard with a sweet and sour mouth, who first smiled at you, warmed you up, whispered courage—and then kicked you into the dirt when you wavered. Wine always had the last laugh. No Hun could defeat it. They drank it, they loved it, they hated it, they died with it in their stomachs. But it won every time.

Attila knew this. He saw it in the old people who lay by the fire with puffy faces, their hands shaking, their livers damaged, their tongues thick. They swore by wine as if it were a god, but it softened them. Soft in the head, soft in the bones. It made them slow, and slow was the first step toward death.

But they drank nonetheless, and Attila drank with them. Not because he believed he could control the wine. But because he knew that you had to let it play along if you didn't want to be excluded. No Hun stayed sober. Sober was suspicious. Sober meant you thought you were better. And anyone who thought that way got knives in the ribs before they had a chance to prove it.

So Attila drank, but he played a different game. He learned when to vomit to keep going. He learned when to laugh so the others wouldn't notice he was controlling his intoxication. He pretended to stagger while remaining clear-eyed. He played drunk while the others were really drunk. And that made him dangerous.

Because wine laughs last, but Attila laughed along with him. He knew how to use it. Wine as a weapon, wine as an excuse. One false step, one false slur, and the blow was there. Many men underestimated him, thinking he was too drunk to stab. They ended up lying in the dust, blood in their mouths, while Attila grinned—half full, half empty, but always on his feet.

The nights in the camp were trials, and wine was judge and executioner. It showed who could stand firm, who could still fight while drunk, who laughed when the world faltered. Attila passed every test. Not because he was stronger, but because he understood that wine is never your friend. It is an enemy you embrace for show.

So he learned to live with two faces: the laughing face that drank, babbled, and roared along—and the cold face that calculated, tested, and struck. Wine was the stage on which he performed. And in the end, when the others were lying, when they were snoring or vomiting, when they were choking on their own blood and mead, Attila was still standing. With split lips, broken jaws, but with that grin that said, "I've seen through you."

Wine laughs last, yes. But sometimes Attila laughed louder. And that was the difference.

## The taste of iron

Blood tastes like iron, and every Hun knows that taste before they can even walk. It's the first thing on your tongue when your mother slaps you for being too slow. It's what sticks between your teeth when someone rips your head open while playing. It's your constant companion, like dust in your lungs or sweat on your skin. The taste of iron is the anthem of the steppe.

Attila learned to love it early on. Other children spat, howled, and screamed when they had blood in their mouths. Not him. He held it in his mouth, let it roll over his tongue as if it were wine. It made him awake, sharp, alive. Blood was not an accident; blood was spice. The taste of iron made everything more real. Without it, life was bland.

The camp smelled of iron, as if the air itself were permeated with it. Blood on the ground, blood on your hands, blood on your knives. You didn't need music, jewelry, or gods—the smell and taste of iron was enough to remind you where you were. Every breath a promise: You die quickly here.

Attila realized that iron wasn't just in the blood. It was in the weapons, in the shackles, in the teeth of the men who snarled at him. Iron was the substance that held everything together. Without iron, the steppe would be nothing but dust and smoke. With iron, it became a slaughterhouse.

He got used to having iron in his mouth. Every blow, every broken lip, every split gum—always the same taste. Metallic, cold, unyielding. But he wasn't afraid of it; he absorbed it. While others choked, he grinned until he was bleeding. While others spat, he swallowed. The taste of iron was his sign that he was alive, that he was paying, that he was in it.

Thus, blood became his drink, iron his bread. Attila didn't need a cup in his hand to celebrate. A cracked mouth was enough. The taste of iron in his mouth was his song, his drug, his promise that he wasn't dead yet.

Blood in your mouth is no reason to stop on the steppe. It's part of everyday life. You spit it out, sometimes red, sometimes dark, sometimes with teeth between them – and you ride on. No man stopped just because his jaw hurt or his stomach was full of iron. Anyone who stopped was already half dead. Anyone who rode on proved they were still alive.

Attila realized early on that spitting blood was nothing unusual. It was like coughing, like puffing, like farting. A sound that was part of riding. Men spat

red blood into the dust, laughed, and rode faster. Children learned it before they could properly speak. Blood was part of riding, part of breathing.

Once, Attila flew out of the saddle at a gallop, hit the ground, and bit his lip. His mouth filled with warm iron. He stood up, spat it into the dust, and laughed. The other boys stared, thinking he was crazy. But he knew: that was precisely the lesson. Blood is not a stop signal. Blood is a kick in the mouth that says: Go faster.

The Huns rode for days, without stopping, without rest. They spat blood from bitten tongues, from chewed lips, from internal wounds that no one saw. But no one complained. Everyone knew: complaining makes you weak, and weakness is the beginning of death. So they rode on, even with their mouths full of iron.

Attila made it a ritual. When he spat blood, he felt stronger. He grinned with a red mouth, as if devouring the steppe itself. The taste of iron became his fuel. Others needed wine, he needed blood. A fresh mouth full of red, and he rode as if there were no tomorrow.

And he realized: spitting blood was more than a necessity; it was also a message. When a Hun rode toward you with a bloody mouth, you knew: The bastard had already paid, and he would make you pay. It was intimidation, a smile with iron, a grin that said, "I'm not satisfied yet."

So spitting blood became a greeting on the steppe. No "hello," no "how are you?" Just a red spit in the dust, and everyone understood: The ride continues, and you'd better keep quiet.

Blood in the mouth means nothing on the steppe. It's as common as dust in your lungs, as the stench of horse sweat, as the creaking of a bed in the wind. You spit it out, wipe your mouth, maybe even laugh—and ride on. No man ever stopped because he had blood in his mouth. Anyone who stopped was already half dead. Anyone who rode on proved they were alive.

Attila understood this early on. As a boy, he often fell from the saddle, rammed his face into the ground, bit his lips, and swallowed dust and iron. He spat, got up, and climbed back on his horse. The other boys sometimes laughed, calling him "bloody mouth." But Attila grinned back, his mouth red, his eyes black. He knew: laughter is cheap, blood is expensive. And he always paid.

Spitting blood became a habit. No horror, no catastrophe. It was a part of everyday life, like saddling up. Men spat it casually, while talking, singing, cursing. It dripped from the corners of their mouths, and they carried on as if it were water. Children saw this, absorbed it, and eventually, iron on their tongues became as normal as bread in their stomachs.

And sometimes it wasn't even your own blood. In a fight, in a brawl, in a tooth-and-fist fight—it was often the other person's blood that spurted into your mouth. Warm, salty, metallic. You spat it out, not out of disgust, but out of space. And then you kept beating. No one cared whose blood it was. Blood is blood, iron is iron, and it makes no difference whose life is currently running down your throat.

Attila liked this taste. It gave him strength. Where others choked, he swallowed. Where others looked away, he grinned. The taste of iron was his motivation, his drug, his sign that he was in the game. Without blood, the day tasted empty. With blood, he was full.

Once, when he was still a teenager, he rode for three days with a broken lip. It was torn, and every breath brought new redness to his mouth. He repeatedly spat on the ground, leaving red stains that disappeared into the dust. His brothers asked if he wanted to stop. He shook his head, grinned with a bloody mouth, and said, "I'll ride until the horse falls." They understood. He wasn't a boy anymore. He was one of them—perhaps tougher.

Spitting blood was more than a necessity; it was also a message. If you came back to camp with a red mouth, everyone could see immediately: This bastard had paid. And whoever paid had a claim. A claim to respect, a claim to meat, a claim to women. Blood was the receipt, and Attila always had one ready.

Sometimes he even overdid it. He would deliberately bite his lip just to stand there with blood in his mouth. He knew what it meant. It made an impression; it made him look like someone who had already fought, even if he had just come out of the tent. Blood in his mouth was better than any armor. It was like a red seal saying, "Leave him alone, he's one of the dead who still walk."

And there was another truth: blood was better than wine. Wine numbed you, slowed you down, made you stagger. Blood, on the other hand, made you sharper. Every drop on your tongue was like a slap in the face, shaking you awake. Attila didn't need a cup; he just needed a few bitten lips, and he was sober enough to strike.

The others eventually saw him as the bastard who never tired, never softened, even with iron on his tongue. They sensed: When this boy spits blood, he laughs while doing it. And a man who laughs while tasting iron is more dangerous than ten fighting sober.

Spitting blood was also a ritual. Before battle, the Huns spat in the dust. Not out of honor, not symbolically. Simply because it was there, because it had to come out. They spat red and rode off. That was their prayer, their song, their anthem. No "Our Father," just a red stain in the dust, and off they went.

Attila took this seriously. Every spit was an oath. Every drop in the sand was a contract with the steppe: "I won't go back until one of us is lying in the dirt." And most of the time it was the other one.

In the end, spitting blood wasn't a sign of weakness. It was strength. It was proof that you were in the game. If you didn't have blood in your mouth, you hadn't fought hard enough. If you didn't have iron on your tongue, you weren't a Hun. Attila knew that, lived that, and became that. Spit blood, laugh, and keep riding—that was his motto.

And so he rode, red-faced, through a world of dust, bones, and smoke. A bastard with the taste of iron on his tongue, always ready for the next fight, always ready to spit out more.

The Huns' mouths were never empty. If there was no meat in them, then there was blood. If there was no blood in them, then there was wine. And if there was none of that to be found, they held a knife between their teeth. Not for fun, not for posturing—but because a Hun without a blade is as naked as a dog without teeth.

Attila learned it as a child: Your mouth isn't just for eating and cursing. It's a halter for steel. Hands on the reins, body galloping, but the steel must never be far away. So you clamp the knife in your mouth, between your teeth, your lips full of iron. You feel the metal, cold, hard, cutting into the flesh if you're not careful. You ride, you breathe, you drool blood, and the knife waits for you to spit it out into your hand, ready to slash someone open.

The taste was the same as always: iron. But it wasn't the blood, it was the blade itself. Tongue on the edge, one wrong tug, and it started flowing again. But that didn't bother anyone. On the contrary, it made you tougher. Riding with a knife in your mouth shows: I'm not afraid to hurt myself if necessary. I'd rather bite steel than be naked.

Attila saw men who carried knives in their mouths like others carry their crosses around their necks. A piece of their identity, a constant companion. Some rode like that for hours, spitting blood, but holding the reins tightly as if it were the most normal thing in the world. Children tried it, cut their lips, cried, and stopped. Attila didn't cry. He bit harder. He wanted to feel the metal, wanted it to become a part of him.

In the camp, the knife in the mouth was a familiar image. When someone approached you like that, you knew: there was no deal, no words, no chance. The knife wasn't just a tool, it was a promise. A hungry grin of iron. A shadow that wanted to devour you.

Attila got used to it, so much so that he sometimes forgot he still had it between his teeth. He spoke with steel in his mouth, slurring his words, but no one laughed. They knew: the boy would grow up, and his mouth was sharper than anyone else's. His words were short, his sentences broken, but his knife spoke for him.

Sometimes, when the camp was asleep, he sat there with the knife between his teeth and imagined what it would be like not to spit it out, but simply to bite down, the edge in his tongue, in the roof of his mouth, blood everywhere. A strange game, but for him it was normal. Those who sleep with iron also dream of it.

The ancients said, "A man who carries his knife in his mouth is not afraid of death." Attila knew it was different. A man who carries a knife in his mouth is only afraid of being caught without it. It wasn't courage, it was necessity. But necessity makes you harder than courage.

And so he grew up, with iron between his lips, with steel sharpening his teeth, with a mouth that always tasted of metal. A knife in his mouth – that was his everyday life, his training, his identity. He was no longer a boy. He was a blade on two legs.

There's that moment when you take a blow to the face, so hard that you don't even notice whether it's your blood or the other guy's blood. All you know is: iron is running down your throat. Warm, sticky, metallic. It scratches your throat as if you've eaten rust. And you can't help it – you swallow. Every Hun knows this feeling. Every Hun knows: This isn't the end, this is a beginning.

Attila learned it early, as a child. One of his cousins had hit him on the head with a club. He fell, felt his throat fill, felt iron run down his throat. At first he

thought he was suffocating. But then came this burning, this scratching, which didn't weaken him, but rather woke him up. He spat, red-faced, into the dust, stood up again, and laughed. His cousin stared at him as if he'd seen a ghost. But Attila knew: He wasn't a ghost. He was iron.

The feeling remained throughout his life. Again and again. Fights, brawls, rides, falls. Iron in his throat, again and again. He got used to it, made it his friend. Others choked, panicked, tried to spit. Attila swallowed, grinned, and carried on. When iron ran down his throat, it was like a drumbeat to him, saying, "Here we go."

In the camp, it was everyday life. Men spat blood into the fire, coughed iron into the grass, vomited red blood into the dust. No one flinched. It was normal. Iron was food, iron was a part of life. Romans might drink wine and feel fine – Huns drank blood, their own, that of their brothers, that of their enemies. And they still stood.

Attila made it a ritual. When he had blood in his throat, he paused briefly, tasted it consciously, and swallowed slowly, as if he wanted to preserve the taste. It made him feel stronger, tougher, unbreakable. It was as if the world were constantly feeding him—not with bread, not with wine, but with iron.

Once, after a fight, the iron went so deep into his throat that he almost vomited. But he held back the urge to gag, swallowed until his stomach burned, and stood there with a red grin. The other men stared at him, saw the blood in his teeth, on his lips, and knew: The boy won't die. The boy will outlive many of us.

For iron in the throat was more than pain. It was a test. Those who couldn't bear it fainted. Those who did, became stronger. Attila passed every test. Again and again. Every drop that trickled down his throat was proof: He wasn't one of the weak who vomited and died. He was one of the dogs who ate whatever they were given—even if it was their own blood.

So iron became his second drink. No feast without blood in his throat, no fight without iron in his belly. And he laughed when he tasted it, laughed with a red mouth, laughed with iron in his throat. A bastard who swallowed death like wine.

The Huns didn't pray to gods made of stone. They built no temples, they had no golden statues decorated with candles. Their prayers were simpler, more direct, more honest. They prayed with iron. Not with words, not with songs,

but with blood in their mouths and steel in their hands. Iron was their prayer, their altar, their god, and their answer all at once.

Attila learned this early on. The ancients said, "Gods don't hear, but iron doesn't lie." And he understood what they meant. You can scream, howl, and moan—the heavens remain silent. But when you draw iron, when you taste blood, when you hear the cracking of bones, then you will receive an answer. Not from heaven, but from the mouth of the man you strike down. That was religion on the steppe. No psalms, just screams. No offerings, except your own blood.

Attila made it his ritual. Before every battle, before every ride, before every fight, he put the iron in his mouth. A knife between his teeth, a blade to his lip, sometimes just the memory of the taste. He felt it, cold and hard, and he knew: This is my prayer. Not a "Please, Lord, help me." Just: "I have steel, so I help myself."

The blood that followed was the answer. It always flowed. From him, from others, from everyone who stood in the way. Iron in the mouth, iron in the throat, iron in the dust. That was the cycle, that was the Hun's mass. No priest needed, no god to be merciful. All you needed was steel and will.

Attila saw men praying as they died, not with words, but with their teeth, which they sank into their knives while still lying in the dust. No "Our Father," only the final taste of iron before the light went out. He saw brothers slay each other with the same prayer. And he understood: Iron is the only god who answers.

He made iron his religion. He didn't just carry it in his hand, he carried it within himself. Every drop of blood, every cut, every bite into the metal was his amen. He needed no priests, no holy books. His body was the book, his scars the verses, his blood the ink. Every cut a prayer, every battle a chapter, every corpse a testimony.

And so Attila prayed, day after day, night after night. Not with folded hands, but with clenched fists. Not in churches, but in the dust. His prayer was the sound of steel piercing flesh. His amen was laughter with a bloody mouth.

The steppe was silent, as always. But Attila was not silent. He prayed loudly, with blows, with shouts, with iron. And the world listened, whether it wanted to or not.

## Men who smell of dead earth

There were men who smelled of horses, of sweat, of smoke. And then there were the others. Those who smelled of dead earth. A smell, heavy, sweet, putrid, like a grave opened too soon. Men who were already half dead before the sword touched them. They were recognized immediately. The steppe recognized them, too.

Attila first encountered this smell when he was still a child. An old warrior returned to the camp, ravaged by scars, his skin gray, his eyes blank. He sat by the fire, ate nothing, spoke nothing, only the stench remained – stale, musty, like an animal carcass. The next morning he lay dead, his mouth open, his tongue black. No one was surprised. The man had smelled of earth for days. The steppe had long since labeled him.

This smell haunted Attila. It resurfaced again and again. In the tents when someone fell ill. On the battlefields when the sun burned on the corpses. In the breath of men who were still alive, but had already rotted from within. Men who continued to ride, continued to fight, but everyone knew: They already had one foot in the grave.

And it affected everyone. No one wanted to sit next to someone like that. No one wanted to eat his meat or drink from his jug. The stench drew boundaries, faster than any word. The steppe could be a community, but the smell of dead earth turned a brother into a stranger. He was living carrion, and everyone avoided him until the dogs came.

Attila smelled it and didn't laugh. He took it seriously. He understood that the stench was a sign. A seal that said: This one has no future. He knew: men smell of what they will become. The strong smelled of fire, of iron, of blood. The weak smelled of earth, of decay. And the steppe made no mistakes in its signs.

This smell became a compass for him. He knew whom to avoid, whom he could still use, and whom he'd better drop immediately. Men who smelled of dead earth weren't companions. They were burdens. And burdens were thrown down on the steppe before they dragged you into the dust.

Attila learned to have no mercy. Anyone who smelled of earth was dead. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow—but soon. And he wouldn't be the idiot who let someone like that drag him into the abyss. So he avoided them, laughed at them, kicked them when necessary. The steppe was hard, and it stank of earth long before the grave was opened.

A Hun camp always stank. Of horse shit, of smoke, of old meat, of semen, of sweat. But there was one stench that masked everything when it appeared: the smell of dead earth. It wasn't a simple smell, not a filth you could laugh off. It was a wall. One that constricted your throat, made you hold your breath, even when you knew it was useless.

Attila often smelled him. An old warrior, sick, coughing, spitting, lay in his tent, and the stench crawled out like a snake. Men passed by, lifted the blanket, saw the body, and knew: Finished. No one said it, no one said "he's dying." But the stench spoke for him. He was the end, announcing itself without anyone having to see a wound.

Children were frightened by the smell. They covered their noses and ran away. Women grimaced, spoke softly, as if the stench were a ghost that could hear them. Men cursed, drank more, and sat farther away from the fire. The stench turned a large camp into small islands. Everyone wanted distance.

Attila didn't laugh when he smelled it. He observed. He knew: A place would soon become available here. A tent, a horse, a woman, perhaps even a piece of land. The stench wasn't a curse for him; it was a promise. A sign that the steppe would once again take what was weak and give what was strong.

Sometimes the stench permeated the entire camp when several people rotted at once. After a battle, it was worst. Not the corpses on the field, but the living, the gravely wounded, still breathing but already smelling of earth. They lay in the tents, groaning, sweating, and the smell wafted over everything. Dogs barked all night, horses grew restless. Even the fire seemed to burn smaller when the air was so thick.

The Huns had no doctors. They had knives, alcohol, and sometimes herbs. But there was nothing against the smell. It was the final judgment. Once it was there, everyone knew: Don't make a fuss. It won't come back. Make way for the next one.

Attila never forgot that. He learned that the stench in the camp was the true voice of the steppe. No oracle, no priest, no gods. Only the smell that told you who had one foot in the ground. And he trusted that smell more than any word.

So he became sharper, harder, colder. The stench didn't weaken him; it made him clear. When the smell of the earth permeated his skin, the story was over.

Attila wasn't the one who continued it. He was the one who closed the final chapter and moved on.

Men who were already half dead were the worst. Not because they were strong, but because they had nothing left to lose. They smelled of earth, they stank of the grave, but they were still standing. And as long as someone's standing, they're dangerous. They no longer strike for glory, not for loot, not for women. They strike because they know they're going to fall anyway. And one blow from a bastard like that can take you down with them.

Attila understood this quickly. He had seen them, the half-dead. Warriors with ripped stomachs, feverish, with eyes that had already glazed over. Men who could no longer laugh, but who bared their teeth once more. They crawled out of tents, grabbed weapons, as if they wanted to prove themselves one last time. And sometimes they succeeded. One of them managed to take three more men with him before collapsing.

The smell of earth warned you. But it didn't warn you enough. Because that stench said, "He'll die soon." But it didn't say he wouldn't be dangerous before then. Half-dead people lashed out wildly, unpredictably, without fear. They flailed, bit, and spat blood in people's faces. They had no control, but sometimes that was enough to catch someone off guard.

Attila learned to be cautious. Not out of respect, but out of calculation. He kept his distance from the half-dead, let others go first, and watched. When he struck, he did it hard and fast, without giving them time to show anything else. No games. No second rounds. Half-dead people received no mercy; they only got the quick cut.

But he also saw how they were worshipped. Some men said half-dead men were possessed by spirits. That they were given one last strength before they finally buried themselves in the earth. They whispered that they shouldn't be challenged. But Attila just spat. He didn't believe in spirits. He believed in steel. Half-dead men were dangerous, yes—but only as long as they weren't taken seriously enough.

And yet the impression remained. When someone limped through the camp with the smell of earth, it fell silent. Children stared, women retreated, men switched sides. Everyone knew: This is no longer a living person, but also not a dead person. It's something in between. And the in-between was frightening.

Attila wasn't afraid. But he respected what they radiated. Not for them, but for what they taught him: Every man becomes like that eventually. Every warrior smells of dead earth when his time comes. And the only question is whether you take another one with you before then, or whether you quietly disappear into the dust.

He swore to himself: If he ever smelled of earth, he wouldn't rot in a tent like a dog. He would go outside, into the fire, the blood, the iron. He wouldn't die silently. He would die so loudly that the sky itself would vomit. Half dead, but dangerous until his last breath.

The steppe was never clean. It was an endless carpet of dust, shit, blood, and carcasses. Every ride took you past corpses. Horses that had collapsed while galloping. Dogs that hadn't run fast enough. Men who hadn't survived the final blow. And each of these bodies gave back its smell. Carrion. Sweet, sharp, sticky in the air, as if the steppe itself were breathing out the dead.

Attila grew up with this smell. For him, it wasn't an exception; it was normal. When the wind shifted, it carried the smell of carrion throughout the entire camp. It settled into the blankets, into the hair, into the meat that was being cooked. Even when you laughed, even when you drank—the stench was there, like an invisible hand grabbing you by the throat.

The Huns knew this. They didn't make faces, they didn't hold their noses. They breathed it in, like smoke, like iron. The smell of carrion was a memory. A reminder that you could end up the same way at any time, in the dust, bloated, pecked at by crows. The stench wasn't just disgusting—it was a teacher. It told you: "Don't savor anything for too long, bastard. Tomorrow you'll smell like that yourself."

Attila took this seriously. He often heard the Romans say the Huns were barbaric because they lived among the dead. But he knew: The Romans hide their corpses behind walls; they pretend death doesn't exist. On the steppe, death was right in front of you, lying beside you, smelling at you while you slept. You couldn't ignore it. And that made you tougher.

There were nights when the smell of carrion pervaded the camp so thickly that no one could sleep. Men tossed and turned, dogs howled, horses nervously kicked the ground. Attila lay awake, sniffed the air, and instead of feeling disgusted, he grinned. For him, the stench wasn't a curse, but a promise. He said, "Others have fallen. Not you. Not yet."

Children sometimes cried when the stench was too strong. Women whispered, speaking of spirits polluting the air. But the men drank more, laughed louder, sang more off-key songs. They knew that the smell of carrion couldn't be banished. They could only drown it out. And if they were strong enough, they made it their own.

Attila did just that. He inhaled it, as if he wanted to get used to smelling like that himself. He wanted the smell not to be an enemy, but a part of him. He knew: Those who cannot bear the smell of carrion will die. Those who love it will survive.

Thus, the steppe itself became a cemetery, an open grave. And the men who lived there eventually smelled the same. The carrion smell of the steppe wasn't just background noise. It was the melody of life. Sweet, rotten, inescapable.

Attila absorbed him until he smelled of it himself. Not of earth, like the half-dead. But of the steppe, of blood, of carrion. He wasn't a victim; he was part of the smell. A living piece of death, riding on.

The worst smell wasn't fresh death. Fresh death was honest. Blood steamed, flesh was still warm, the iron stung your nose. That was clean dirt. The worst smell was the one that lingered. The one that didn't go away, even when the body had long since become bones. The stench that ate into tents, into blankets, into skin, into thoughts. The stench that remained, even after you'd ridden miles away.

Attila realized this as he grew older. You can leave corpses behind, you can give them to the dogs, the crows, the steppe itself. But the smell remains. It clings to your beard, your fur, your throat. You wake up at night, the wind still, the camp quiet—and yet you still smell it. Earth, rotten, sweet, like a curse that won't go away.

The men didn't talk about it, but they all knew it. They washed themselves with alcohol, with smoke, and rubbed themselves with grease, but it didn't help. The stench remained. It was like a tattoo, the steppe burning beneath your skin. Invisible, but always there. Some went mad from it. They swore they smelled the ghosts of the fallen. Others drank more than their livers could handle. But the stench just laughed and remained.

Attila didn't pretend to be surprised. He accepted it. He knew: This is the price. Everyone who is alive carries the smell of the dead with them. There is no

riding without it, no laughter without it, no sleep without it. The stench was the invisible currency everyone paid.

Sometimes he was stronger, sometimes weaker. After a battle, he was like a storm whipping through the camp. Weeks later, he was just a whisper, a remnant. But he was never gone. Even in spring, when the grass was green and the wind was gentle, there was always a smell of earth, of death, somewhere. The steppe itself stank of decay, as if it wanted everyone to never forget who lay here.

And that's exactly what made Attila tougher. He knew: Anyone who denies the stench, anyone who pretends it's not there, is an idiot. They become weak, soft, blind. The stench is truth. It tells you: Everyone laughs, everyone rides, everyone eats, but in the end, everyone stinks the same. And when you know that, you can use it.

Attila took advantage of it. He wore the scent like a second skin. When he entered a strange camp, the others immediately sensed that he wasn't a man of clean walls. He brought with him the steppe, the stench, the memory of all the dead who lay behind him. It was his aura, his crown, long before he was king.

And so the stench remained. Not just in the air, but within himself. He knew: I am one of those men who smell of dead earth. But for me, it doesn't mean I'm dying. For me, it means I'm alive, like a piece of the steppe itself. Putrid, eternal, indestructible.

## Rome laughs before it pukes

Rome. The city of cities, they say. Golden roofs, marble columns, fountains that trickle as if they've never heard of drought. Men in togas who talk, talk, talk until their own breath smells like perfume. Women in silk who smile as if they've never seen shit. Rome was a laugh. A big, smug laugh. But anyone who's ever laughed for too long knows: Afterward comes the vomiting.

Attila heard stories of Rome early on. Merchants spoke as if they had been to paradise. Wine that tasted better than blood. Food that smelled of honey, not horse fat. Stone houses that didn't collapse when the wind roared. He heard all this, and he laughed. Not because it wasn't true—but because he knew that

none of it lasts forever. Every wall breaks, every laughter crumbles, every paradise rots.

The Romans laughed at the Huns. Barbarians, they said. Wild, smelly bastards who knew nothing but riding, eating, and killing. They spoke of culture, of order, of gods more beautiful than the shabby spirits of the steppe. They laughed because they believed they were safe, because they had walls and armies. But walls don't protect against hunger, against fear, or against iron. And armies collapse when the men inside lust after gold and would rather fuck their emperors than lead them.

Attila knew: Rome's laughter is hollow. It's like the laughter of a drunk who thinks he's king while lying in the dirt. Rome laughs because it believes it is untouchable. But every laughter eventually suffocates in its own vomit.

The Huns heard the stories of Rome and rubbed their hands together. Not because they were envious. There was no envy on the steppe—there was no time for that. They heard the stories and smelled plunder. Gold, women, wine, houses, everything that glittered. For the Huns, Rome was no paradise. It was a fat carcass laughing just before it burst.

Attila understood this more deeply than anyone else. He saw the weakness behind the brilliance. He saw that laughter is always a harbinger of vomiting. And he swore to himself: One day, I will be the one to make Rome vomit.

Rome is facade, theater, and fake perfume. They erect statues until your eyes hurt, polish marble blocks until you see your own face in them—and for a fleeting moment, you think you're somebody. Then you turn around and realize: beneath all the splendor, the beams are rotten, the foundations as rotten as stale bread. That's exactly what Rome is: gold that shines until you lean on it and realize it's just varnish.

The merchants talk of columns, the scholars talk of law, and the senators smile with teeth whiter than a priest's conscience. They celebrate, they eat, they compliment each other on the quality of their wine, and as they do so, the stories they cling to rot. Rome builds facades because it's afraid to look inside. Better a beautiful lie than the stench of truth.

Attila sees this. He smelled it not only in the golden fingers shimmering in the light, but also in the empty gazes behind the tunics. There sit men who have never saddled a horse, whose strongest muscle is their tongue. They think in terms of paragraphs, not blood, and believe that paragraphs can eat

something. They believe that paper and seals repair the world, as if paper were a wall that keeps out realities. Ridiculous. Paper rots, paper burns. A knife doesn't burn, it cuts.

And therein lies the irony: The Romans, with their temples and bronze statues, are more afraid of chaos than of war. They pile up security in the form of stones, in the form of rules, in the form of soldiers they can pay. But the biggest hole in Rome is not the poverty on the outskirts, not the filth in the alleys—it's the desire within. Greed makes foundations rot. If men would rather hoard gold than stand up and judge, then no marble, no altar will do you any good. The pillars will fall when everyone just counts instead of shovels.

The Huns don't come with seals. They come with hooves, with hunger, with the intention of taking, without forging papyrus or insuring wine. For Rome, this is first comical, then embarrassing, then deadly. The Romans laughed at first. Barbarians, they said. Savages who didn't know how to cook a dinner with a knife and fork. He who laughs before he vomits is safe—until the nausea comes. And the nausea comes when the tooth of need gnaws at the golden brick and realizes: there's nothing inside.

The rich Romans sleep in beds so soft you can forget how to fight. They have gardens, and in these gardens their dreams grow, blind as plants that have never tasted rain. But these dreams are chained to people below, who toil, who crunch the numbers—slaves, artisans, administrators. All the splendor is the achievement of a war by swine who never see the laurel wreaths. When the system breaks, when the slaves stop counting, when the money stops coming, the facade collapses. That is the moment that consumes Attila. Not out of hatred, but rather out of a sober anticipation: "Wait until they realize what's missing."

Rome has teachers, philosophers, rhetoricians—men who speak finely and use big words to frame their own nothingness. They send diplomats with papers that smell of leather and expect that to be enough. But it's not enough when your fields are burning or when your slave army lies infected with typhus. Words are salt on wounds that only steel can heal. Attila laughs at the speeches delivered in halls while outside a herd of horses defecates and the tents burn. Their big words are just curtains, and curtains burn.

Golden facades, rotten foundations—that's not just a saying. It's the strategy of the blind: the shell is polished until the decay is covered. And Rome? Rome polishes like a maniac. Feeding the circus, rationing bread, staging games—all so that the mob watches and doesn't think. "Tell me, Brutus, how many coins

does it take until the people are silent?" That's the question no one asks out loud. The answer is: too much, always too much. Money only moves the clock; it doesn't stop the rat hole in the foundation.

Attila observes, he doesn't plan complicatedly. His art of war is simple: find the spot where it hurts and hang the hooks there. A path with few posts, a thin supply network—perrie quietly: strike. The Romans are a house with many doors, but if you open all the doors at once, the house simply collapses. Not pompous. Quiet, dirty, effective. Like a knife in the dark.

And it's not just walls and pillars. It's the men who feel important in Rome. Senators' widows, praetorians, ballad singers—each thinks their role is eternal. They drag out crises, they discuss duties while outside people are dying. Their sense of inviolability is so great that they don't see the ground giving way beneath them. Walls don't support the soul; they only deceive the eyes. Attila knows this, and that makes him not a monster, but a mirror. He reflects what the Romans don't want to see: that their laughter is thin, that their prosperity is a thermometer that a new plague can't measure.

The merchants in Rome make money from everything. They laugh when a horde rides by—they see the opportunity. They pack their sacks, count, barter, sell. But their pockets quickly become heavier than their morale. They know that the gold they accumulate won't protect them forever. It buys allies, not hearts. And when the allies are tired, when the armies at home are on strike, no ducat will help. You can't buy the loyalty of their stomachs when they're empty. All that money is just cement flowers—pretty, but rootless.

Attila turns the game around in the simplest way: he takes what isn't nailed down. His men crawl through gaps overlooked by Roman bureaucracy, striking where the Romans are too proud to touch dirt. They tear what they need. They leave smoke behind and don't ask for permission. Rome has no time for blows from below because Rome convinces itself that it can't bleed. This makes it deadly naive.

And when Rome smiles its last, it isn't the heroic death that stories paint. It's the quiet vomiting of a city that has overindulged in splendor. The Romans might say they brought civilization. Perhaps. But civilization without roots is like a drunken horse: it looks impressive until it falls over and dies. Attila stands on the sidelines of this spectacle, watching the ballet descend into chaos. He is neither philosopher nor judge. He's just the guy who tears down the curtain and looks at what lies beneath.

Rome laughs—loudly, crookedly, hollowly. But laughter is only the last respite from evil. And Attila? He stands there with wet boots, blood on his hands, thinking: "Just laugh. The vomiting will come sooner than you think." And he's right. For a house built on lies is merely a grave that dresses up nicely before it's shoved shut.

Rome has wide, columned streets where senators strut like gods. But next door, just around the corner, lie the alleys that smell of sweat, piss, blood, and cheap broth. That's the true breath of the city. The facades gleam, the alleys stink. Attila would have laughed if he'd smelled it, and at the same time sensed: Here, everything is already rotting before his horses' hooves even touch the first stone.

The wealthy neighborhoods have marble floors, and servants pour water to tame the dust. But the dust still creeps in. It always finds a way. And along with the dust comes the stench from the alleys. There squat the poor, the cripples, the prostitutes with their rotten teeth. There lie dead dogs, their fur crumbling like paper because no one has time to dispose of them. Children vomit up the last of their porridge while their mothers raise their hands to beg for bread.

Rome calls itself "the eternal city," but its alleys tell a different story: decay, disease, filth. You can polish the palace as much as you like—the stench still creeps up into the emperors' bedrooms. They can pour perfume, burn incense, and hire singers. But when they open their windows at night, the filth creeps in, settles in their lungs, and whispers: "You are not eternal. You are already rotting."

Attila would have loved these alleys. Not out of compassion—he didn't know compassion. But because he would have immediately seen that true power lay here. The poor are hungry, the sick are desperate, and hunger and despair are always weapons if someone can wield them. Rome sees them as filth, but Attila would have seen: This is flammable material. One spark, and the entire city is ablaze.

The alleys are full of contrasts. Wealth and disease cling to the same walls. In one house, they eat grapes; in the next, children die of diarrhea. On a staircase, musicians play with golden chains, while next to them, a prostitute spreads her legs for copper coins. It's not a system—it's a disease disguised as order.

And the illness isn't just physical. It's in people's minds. The poor believe they're to blame because the gods have cursed them. They crawl to temples, throw their last coins into offering boxes, and go back to their holes, hungry,

dirty, convinced that everything has to be this way. And the rich laugh about it, give alms to wash their hands of it, and think that's all that's gone. But the stench remains.

Attila would have sensed that this was the weak point. Not the walls, not the legions, not the palaces. But the alleys, the rotten teeth, the hungry stomachs. A city that lets its own streets rot has already lost. It is a carcass that eats itself. It doesn't need an enemy from outside; it rots from within.

The stench of the alleys was worse than any battlefield smell. The battlefield stinks of blood, of shit, of burnt flesh—honest, direct, raw. The alleys stink of slow decay. Of pus, of phlegm, of life too weak to die. A smell that lingers, that creeps into your skin and stays with you, even long after you're outside.

Attila would have imprinted this smell on his beard like a seal. He would have said: "That's not a stench, that's proof. Rome is not a lion, Rome is a pigsty that thinks it's a temple." And he would have been right.

The Romans may laugh in their halls, but the streets don't. They vomit. They wheeze. They silently pray for an end. Attila would have been that wish—the end, the blow, the hooves. No messiah, no god. Just the knife that says: "There. That's it."

The emperors of Rome sat on thrones worth more than a hundred horses. Gold, ivory, marble—everything glittered, everything shone. But their bodies beneath were soft. Softer than bread that's been left in fat for too long. They were called "Caesar," "Imperator," "Augustus." Grand titles for men with glass bellies that shatter at the first blow.

Attila heard stories about them. Men who spent more time with slave girls than with weapons. Men who preferred holding feasts to fighting battles. Men who called themselves gods while their soldiers starved. Their bellies bulged beneath their togas, bulging with wine and figs. They made speeches with sweet words, but everyone knew: one slight push, and they would break like glass.

The Romans still loved their emperors. Or at least they pretended to. They cheered in the arenas, threw flowers, sang songs, while those glass bellies waved from the stands. But the cheers were bought. Bread and circuses, that was the formula. Give the people meat, give them blood in the circus, and they'll clap for any bastard, no matter how soft their belly is.

Attila understood the game. He saw that the emperors' power lay not in their strength, but in money. They bought their loyalty. Soldiers who were paid fought. Soldiers who didn't receive gold ran away. It wasn't a realm of loyalty; it was a realm of coins. And coins are like glass—they clink beautifully, but they break easily.

The emperors had advisors, senators, generals—all men who talked more than they fought. They built palaces, temples, monuments. They hoped that stone would give them strength. But stone doesn't protect a weak belly. Attila knew that a man who doesn't fight himself never deserves respect. An emperor with a glass belly can have a hundred palaces, but when he falls, the dogs laugh first.

Some emperors were worse than others. Madmen who considered themselves gods, declared their horses consuls, and fucked their sisters while the empire burned. Attila heard the stories and shook his head. To him, it was a joke. On the steppe, such a man wouldn't have lasted a week. A glass belly would have burst with the first fist. But in Rome, they tolerated him because they were afraid, because they were too fed up to rebel.

And that was precisely the weakness. A people that accepts glass bellies on thrones is a people ready to vomit. They are fat, they are lazy, they want to be entertained, not free. Attila would have laughed at them, those emperors, would have spat in their faces, and no one would have dared to strike back. Because glass cannot break iron.

Attila knew: Rome laughs with its emperors. But the laughter sounds hollow. It's the laughter of a man who has eaten too much and feels the pressure in his stomach. Glass bellies eventually crack. And when they do, it stinks worse than any alley.

There's a laughter that resonates with power. And there's a laughter that resonates with fear. Rome laughed loudly, sparklingly, like a drunk at a banquet, already staggering but still calling out, "One more pitcher!" This laughter doesn't last long. It's the laughter you hear just before someone falls to their knees, hands over their stomach, and vomits.

Attila understood this without ever having been to Rome. He saw it in the faces of the merchants who talked about their riches but nervously rubbed their purses. He heard it in the voices of the envoys who laughed while they negotiated, but whose hands trembled when he looked at them. The laughter was a facade. Behind it was fear. Fear of the steppe, fear of hunger, fear of the truth that gold doesn't fight.

The Romans held festivals, they sang, they cheered in arenas while gladiators died. They drank, they ate, they belched in unison. That was their laughter—a laughter that masked the fact that outside the streets stank, that the legions were tired, that the coins were dwindling. It was the laughter of a dying man who turns up the music so he can't hear his own wheezing.

Attila knew: this laughter was choking. Sooner or later, it would stick in his throat. The wine would flow back, the scraps of bread would stick, and suddenly the cheering would be silent. A city that laughed like that couldn't scream when the iron came. It had laughed itself deaf.

And that's the moment Attila loved. When the cheering stops. When the drums in the arenas fall silent because no one is clapping anymore. When the emperor looks around and realizes his soldiers are gone because their pay hasn't arrived. When the rich widows close their windows because they can no longer mask the stench in the alleys. This suffocation, this rupture—that was the sound the Huns wanted to hear. Not a battle cry, not a scream. Just the choking of a city realizing it's laughed for too long.

Rome laughs before it vomits. And when it vomits, it doesn't vomit a little wine. Then the intestines come with it. Then the whole gluttonous heart rises. And that's the end. No heroic death, no glorious apocalypse. Just the vomiting of a city that thought it was eternal and now lies in its own vomit.

Attila was no poet, no philosopher. But he didn't need verses to understand. He saw it clearly: A city that laughs like this dies of its own laughter. And when the laughter dies, that is the hour when steel speaks.

## Gold on dirty fingers

Gold only shines for those who never have enough of it. For the Huns, it was initially nothing but metal. Heavy, soft, sparkling—nice, but no horse, no meat, no knife. But the Romans gave the metal a soul. They worshipped it like a god. They hunted it like dogs. They gave themselves up for it, selling women, men, lands, honor. Gold was their religion.

Attila saw this and laughed. He knew: gold makes men soft. It sticks to their fingers, but their fingers become weak. Dirty fingers that can no longer ride, can no longer fight, because all they do is count. Every sack of gold is like a rope around your neck—the heavier it gets, the less air you get.

The Huns quickly learned how to use gold against the Romans. Take it from them, and they'll howl. Give it back, and they'll worship you. Threaten to take it, and they'll sell their mothers. Attila knew: The shining metal is stronger than any blade—but only if you know how to use it.

But the gold also made the Huns dirty. Fingers that smelled of blood suddenly smelled of coins too. Some buried it, some stuffed it in boots, some hung it around women's necks. It clung to everyone, the shine and the dirt at the same time. Attila saw how his men hoarded it, how their eyes gleamed like the Romans'. And he knew: the metal is addictive, worse than wine, worse than meat, worse than any woman.

He himself played a different game. For him, gold was merely a tool. He let it slide through his fingers, observed its shine, felt its weight—and then put it down again. He knew: A horse will take you further than a coin. A knife will save your life, not a shiny piece of metal. But he saw how others died for it, how others held onto it with dirty fingers until they lay in the dust.

Gold on dirty fingers—that was the true image of Rome and the Huns at the same time. It made no difference whether you were sitting in the palace or in your tent. As soon as your fingers were sticky, you were trapped. And Attila grinned. He was the only one who understood: gold is just dirt with a shine.

Coins clink cleanly in the hand, but as soon as they land in blood, they sound dull, hollow, as if they'd realized their luster was worthless. Attila often saw coins scattered in the dust, next to men who had been slashed to death, their fingers still reaching for them. One last grasp at nothing, and then they died with that greed in their eyes. It was both ridiculous and sad.

The Romans paid with coins to buy peace. They threw down sacks as if they would stop death. But death doesn't take money. Death takes flesh, breath, time. Coins are just metal that shines until it gets wet. And blood washes away the shine faster than any rain. Attila knew: Gold in your pocket means nothing if your belly is ripped open. Then it's just ballast that drags you down into the earth.

The Huns still found it fascinating. They collected coins like trophies, stuffed them into bags, tied them to their belts, and laughingly threw them into the fire, only to pull them out again. But in the end, there was always blood on them. Coins weren't handed over cleanly; they were plucked from corpse fingers. Every Roman payment reeked of death, whether peaceful or forced.

Attila soon realized: Coins in blood are more than payment. They are a curse. Anyone who grabs them too greedily will die. He saw men slay their own brothers simply because a bag of coins lay in the dust. He saw women sell their bodies for a few gold pieces and then perish in the nearest ditch. Gold was never just metal. It was poison. And the blood was the proof.

Once, after a raid, Attila found a sack full of coins lying in a pool of blood. He reached in, felt the cold metal, and pulled his hand out again. It was red, sticky, and the coins clung to it like parasites. He laughed, spat in the blood, and said, "Is that your god? A piece of metal that doesn't even stay dry?" His men stared, but no one dared to object.

Rome thought everything could be settled with coins. Peace, war, alliances, betrayal—everything had a price. But coins in blood don't lie. They show that every deal ultimately has the same goal: death. Whether you're bought, sold, or bribed, the end is always the same: a sack in the dust, fingers clutching at it, and blood blackening the edges.

Attila played with this knowledge. He took the coins, but he laughed as he did so. He showed his men that they were nothing but prey. Tools, not targets. "Hold them in your hand, but hold your knife tighter," he said. For whoever held coins tighter than steel was already dead, even if he was still breathing.

Thus, coins in blood became a symbol. Not of wealth, but of stupidity. For men who didn't understand that brilliance means nothing when your heart stops. Attila saw it, smelled it, tasted it. And he swore he would never end up like that—with coins in his fist and blood in his throat.

Gold shines like the sun, but as soon as it falls into the wrong hands, it smells like shit. Rome was perfect at this. They extracted gold from all corners of the world, from mines, from tribute, from slave labor. They piled it up like dragons on piles of metal. But the more they had, the worse it stank. Not because the gold itself rots. Gold doesn't rot. It's the hands that touch it. Hands that had previously wallowed in sweat, blood, and dirt.

Attila saw this stench without ever smelling it. He felt it in the faces of the envoys who held out sacks of gold to him. Shining coins, cleanly polished, but their eyes said something else: greed, fear, filth. The gold sparkled, but it carried the stench of everything that had died for it. Men in mines whose lungs turned black. Women who were sold to obtain coins. Children who had perished in the dust because someone thought their emperor needed more shine on his statue.

The Huns laughed at the gold, but they used it anyway. They filled their sacks, hung chains around their necks, and drank from golden bowls they had stolen from the Romans. But if you looked closely, there was always dirt on them. A coin shone, but blood clung to the rim. A cup sparkled, but it stank because it came from the hands of men who preferred whipping slaves to carrying water themselves.

Attila sensed this contradiction. He knew that gold was addictive, that men would sell themselves for it. But he also knew: gold never smells clean. It's always dirty, no matter how often you polish it. It bears the fingerprints of a thousand bastards who have owned it before. And your fingers smell of sweat, of feces, of decay.

Once, he watched his men break open a Roman chest. Gold coins rained out, clinking and sparkling in the dust. The Huns laughed, digging in, almost rolling around in it like children. But when they were finished, their skin was black, greasy, and stinking. "See?" Attila cried. "Your god shines, but he stinks like your ass." They laughed, but they didn't stop collecting the coins.

That's the thing about gold: everyone knows it stinks. But everyone still wants it. It's like a whore with rotten teeth—you know you're going to catch the plague, but you go in anyway because your hunger is greater than your disgust.

Rome built its empire on this stench. They sold cleanliness, but the foundations stank. Attila didn't have to think long: anyone who builds an empire on stinking gold won't build it to last forever. He knew: sooner or later, Rome would suffocate on its own treasury.

Gold that stinks of shit was the symbol of everything Rome was. Shine over filth. Facade over decay. A laugh that couldn't hide the stench. Attila saw it more clearly than any philosopher. And he knew: An empire that smells like that can't be saved. It can only burn.

There are hands that work. Hands that saddle horses, sharpen knives, and haul firewood. These hands are dirty, but honest. And then there are the other hands. Hands that do nothing but grasp, count, and press. Hands that devour gold. They don't look full when they hold coins—they look hungrier. Greedy fingers that tremble as if gold were a drug.

Attila saw such hands among the Romans, but also among his own people. Roman hands were soft, adorned with rings, nails clean, skin white. But when gold was involved, they turned into claws. They clutched coins as if they could

hold nothing else. Hun hands were rough, covered in scars, nails broken. But when they reached into a chest, they were just as sick. Fingers that could hold blood suddenly trembled before a sack of metal.

Attila hated this sight. Not because he despised gold, but because he knew that hands that eat gold no longer hold swords. A man who counts more coins than he delivers blows is lost. His grip is soft, his blow hollow. The Huns were meant to be horsemen, not bookkeepers. But the gold clung to them, like a poison that eats away silently.

The Romans built their empire on these hands. Senators who weighed coins as if they were lives. Merchants who preferred to stare at the scales rather than the sun. Priests who counted offerings while babbling about gods. All hands that ate but never gave. And Attila knew: Such hands don't raise an empire. They tear it down.

Once, he observed one of his men, furiously collecting gold coins while fighting continued around him. He knelt in the dust, grabbing coins as if he were a dog stealing bones, his hooves still pounding. Attila rode up to him, dismounted, ripped the coins from his fingers, and punched him in the face. "Hands that eat gold are no good for fighting," he growled. The man bled, but grinned nonetheless—and reached for the next coin.

That was the curse. You can beat men, you can humiliate them, you can show them that gold is worthless – but they still grab hold. Their fingers want to eat. They want to feel the metal clink. It's a hunger worse than that for meat or wine. It's a hunger that weakens you, even when you think it makes you strong.

Attila played on this knowledge. He left his men gold, but he took away their right to see it as a target. "Hold it tight, but hold your knives tighter," he said. But he knew that not everyone understood that. Some would die in the dust, with gold in their fingers, instead of drawing their swords.

Romans or Huns, it made no difference. Hands that eat gold are all the same. They tremble, they stick, they smell of dirt. Attila laughed when he saw them. It was clear to him: Such hands dig their own graves. And when the empire falls, they will still cling, even in death.

Gold is like meat without blood. You chew and chew, but it doesn't go down your throat, it doesn't fill you up, it doesn't give you strength. It shines, yes. It clink, yes. But it doesn't fill anyone. Men starve with full chests. Women freeze with gold chains around their necks. Children die while their fathers count

coins. That's the truth no one wants to see: Gold doesn't fill you up. It only makes you greedier.

Attila knew that. He had seen enough. Romans who, with overflowing treasuries, still wept because they couldn't look the Huns in the eye. Merchants who hoarded gold but still begged like dogs with a knife at their throats. Huns who buried themselves in gold, only to realize they were still hungry. Gold is a lie. A shiny, sweet lie.

Once, a Roman envoy arrived with carts full of coins. He was sweating, grinning, and saying, "This is peace." Attila took a bag, threw it on the ground, and stamped on it with his boot until the coins flew in all directions like stones. Then he spat and said, "Your peace shines, but it doesn't fill my belly." The Roman fell silent. He knew he was right. Gold doesn't buy time, peace, or life. It's just metal, and metal that doesn't cut is worthless.

Still, everyone grabbed for it. Like dogs after bones. Attila saw it in the eyes of his men, saw it in the eyes of the Romans, saw it in the eyes of every bastard who ever heard of gold. It's a hunger that can't be satisfied. You give them a sack, they want two. You give them ten, they want a hundred. And when they have a hundred, they want more. Gold is a hole in the belly that's never filled.

Attila knew: This is the greatest weakness. Not hunger for meat, not thirst for water. But hunger for gold. For a man hungry for meat fights until he is satisfied. But a man hungry for gold fights forever – and still dies with an empty stomach.

Thus, gold became a tool for him. Not a goal, never a target. He took it to satisfy others—but never to satisfy himself. He knew he couldn't live on it. He lived on blood, on iron, on the steppe. Gold was merely the bait with which he controlled others.

The Romans never understood this. For them, gold was everything. They built temples for it, they killed each other for it, they called it god. But their god didn't satisfy them. He left them hungrier and hungrier, until they became weak, soft, fragile. Attila saw this and grinned. He knew: An empire that worships gold is already dead before the first sword falls.

And so it was. Gold, which no one can satisfy, clung to every finger, glittered in every eye. But it brought no peace, no rest. It was merely a promise that was never fulfilled. An empty dream that men clung to until death. Attila let them dream—and took away the rest.

## Ambassador in the dust

Ambassadors are men with clean fingers and dirty tongues. They travel with writings, seals, and gifts. They speak sweetly as honey, but if you listen more closely, fear drips from every word. They are the messengers of the powerful, but in the dust they are nothing—just men who hope their mouths will save them while their bodies tremble.

Attila saw many of them. Romans in perfumed tunics, Greeks with long speeches, merchants with greasy beards. They came into the camp with carts full of wine, gold, and silk. They bowed deeply, talking of "friendship," "peace," and "eternal alliance." They spoke as if words could stop iron. But they stood in the dust just like everyone else. The wind blew in their faces, the horses snorted at their necks, and they realized: their words make no difference when the knife is only a breath away.

The Huns laughed at ambassadors. They placed them on barrels, gave them goat's milk to drink, and made them wait until their faces turned red in the sun. "You want peace? Then sweat it out," they said. Some ambassadors persevered, others toppled over before they could even unroll their parchment.

Attila listened to their speeches, but he didn't listen to the words. He listened to the pauses between them, to the trembling in their voices, to the eyes that darted nervously around the square. Words were cheap, but fear was genuine. And he smelled the fear in every ambassador who came.

Some were arrogant, thinking they could impress him with titles. "The exalted Senate... the glorious Emperor... the eternal city..." Attila just grinned, spat in the dust, and said, "Only the wind is eternal." Then they knew their seals were worthless.

Ambassadors in the dust—that was the image he loved. Men who usually stood in halls, basking in the splendor of palaces, knelt in the dirt before him, a bastard from the steppe, with blood on their boots. That was power. Not the words, not the coins—but the image. The dust clung to their knees, and the parchment fluttered uselessly in the wind.

And often, when they left, not all of their bones were still. Some remained lying in the dust, their tongues silent, their seals burned. For Attila knew: Messages that aren't true are garbage. And garbage is left lying around.

Parchment flutters, iron cuts. It was that simple. The Romans believed that a seal carried more weight than a sword. They thought that a piece of animal hide, covered with clean words, could stop the fury of a horde. Parchment versus iron – like reading a poem to a wolf just before it rips your throat out.

Attila loved this spectacle. Ambassadors arrived with scrolls as long as an arm, with letters as fine as spider webs. They read them loudly, as if the words themselves were building walls. "In the name of the Senate, in the name of the Emperor, in the name of peace..." – always the same shit. While they talked, the Huns clashed their swords, belched, and pissed in the dust. They knew: words are nothing against iron.

Attila let them talk because he wanted to laugh. He didn't listen to the sentences, he listened to the sound. Parchment crackles when you tear it. Iron sings when you pull it. He knew the difference, and he knew the world knew the difference too. No man on horseback ever feared a scroll. But every man feared the singing of iron in the wind.

Some ambassadors trembled so much they could barely hold the scrolls. Sweat dripped onto the parchment, the ink ran, the words smudged. Attila grinned. "Your words die faster than you," he once said to a Roman envoy who was as pale as ash. And he was right: A sentence can disappear before it's finished. A cut remains.

The Romans continued to send more and more parchment. Long letters, thick seals, even small books. They believed that quantity demonstrates strength. But Attila was a man who knew: quantity is just more to burn. Once, he threw ten scrolls into the fire while the ambassador spoke. "It's warm now," he said. "At least your emperor sent me wood." The Huns roared with laughter, the ambassador wept silently.

Iron has no arguments. It only has answers. Parchment tries to persuade. Iron compels. Attila threw parchment into the dust, but he held onto iron. And every man who saw that knew where the truth lay. Not in the writing, but in the cutting.

So the ambassadors became jokes. Everyone knew they came with parchment and left with fear. Some survived, some didn't. But the parchment never survived. It burned, it tore, it became a rag. And iron remained. Always.

Words are light. They flutter like dust in the wind. You can shout them, sing them, pray them, whisper them – in the end, they fall down, land on your

boots, and you kick them away. Blood, on the other hand, sticks. Blood tastes, burns, stinks. No one forgets blood. Attila knew: Words land in the dust, but blood stays in the mouth.

The ambassadors came with their fine words. "Peace." "Alliance." "Honor." All capital syllables that sounded clean in their pointed mouths. They threw them into the steppe like breadcrumbs, hoping the Huns would eat them like doves. But Huns didn't eat words. Huns chewed flesh, bones, iron. And if an ambassador ventured too far, his own blood was the only thing the steppe tasted like.

Attila listened, sometimes. He let them talk, until their tongues ran dry, until their lips cracked. And then he simply raised a finger. One of his men stepped forward, struck, and suddenly there were words in the dust, blood in the mouth. Parchment fluttered in the wind, but the screams drowned it out. So much for honor. So much for peace.

The Romans didn't understand this. They thought words had weight. They thought parchment was a weapon. But every Hun knew: the only word that counts is a scream that comes after a cut. Everything else is air.

Attila savored the moment when an ambassador realized his words were worthless. Their eyes widened, their voices broke, the parchment trembled. They suddenly no longer saw the Huns as "barbarians" but as a mirror. And in the mirror, they recognized themselves—weak, trembling, with blood at their mouths.

Once, an ambassador walked so proudly that he didn't even look at Attila's hooves. He read as if he were in the Senate, as if the camp were just another palace. Attila let him finish. Then he stood up, walked over to him, took the parchment, stuffed it in his mouth, and pounded his teeth until blood ran over the paper. "Now you have words in the dust and blood in your mouth," he said. The Huns laughed; the ambassador almost choked on his own message.

That's how these games always went. Words in the dust, blood in the mouth. That was the only contract the steppe understood.

Dust is the true judge of the steppe. It settles on everything, be it parchment or corpse, gold or bone. It devours words, it devours tears, it devours the remains of men who believed diplomacy would save them. Dust swallows everything.

Attila knew this. Ambassadors spoke, their voices echoing in the wind, but after just a few steps, nothing remained. The words fell, heavy as stones, and the dust swallowed them, making them invisible. No man in the camp remembered the words the next day. But everyone remembered the blood, the stench, the dust that clung to the ambassadors' lips as they knelt in the dirt.

Rome sent diplomats as if they were soldiers. But they were unarmed, except with speeches no one wanted to hear. The dust listened—and laughed. It settled on the scrolls, turning them gray, rendering them worthless. Attila needed no effort to demonstrate how pointless it was. He only had to wait. The dust did the rest.

Once, an envoy arrived with a letter so beautifully decorated it almost shone. He held it high, proudly, as if it were a shield. But when he reached Attila, the letter was already covered in dust. The edges were gray, the writing barely legible. Attila grinned: "Your emperor sent me dust. Thank you. I've already had enough." The ambassador fell silent, lowered his gaze, and everyone knew that the dust had already swallowed him before he even spoke.

The Huns loved these scenes. For them, it was entertainment. Men who thought they could conquer the steppe with words, only to suffocate in the dust. They threw the remains of their wine in their faces and laughed when they coughed. They knew: diplomacy is a game for cities, not for horsemen. And on the steppe, dust always wins.

Attila looked deeper. He understood that dust not only swallowed diplomacy, but exposed it. Words are worthless if they don't survive. Iron survives. Blood survives. Dust survives. But speeches? They're already dead before they leave the mouth. Ambassadors in the dust are not masters, not saviors. They are merely victims with tongues.

Thus, every attempt at diplomacy on the steppe became a spectacle that always ended the same way: dust in the mouth, parchment in the dirt, faces gray with fear. The steppe swallowed everything, and Attila grinned, knowing that no letter in the world could conquer the dust.

The tongue is a man's weakest weapon. It can flatter, lie, and plead. But it cannot stop a shoe, a hoof, or a blow. On the steppe, the ambassadors quickly realized this: their tongues were useless. They flapped like dead fish in the dust, while their eyes screamed with the fear their words sought to conceal.

Attila liked these faces. A man who realizes his tongue can no longer save him looks more honest than any saint. He trembles, he stammers, he chews his own lips. Sometimes they even bite their tongues, as if they wanted to kill the thing that betrayed them. But it's no use. A tongue without weight is just flesh that soon rots.

The Romans never understood this. For them, the tongue was everything. Speeches, decrees, oaths. Entire armies were led by words, not by men. They believed that speeches build walls. Attila knew: walls are broken down with hooves, and speeches are merely sound that vanishes in the wind.

Once, an ambassador was brought before him who talked so much that the Huns began to bet on whether he would ever draw a breath. He spoke of peace, of alliances, of honor, of God. Attila listened, drank, and belched. When the man finally fell silent, Attila stood up, grabbed him by the jaw, and cut out his tongue. "Now you're honest," he said. The man screamed, fell into the dust, blood spurting. The Huns laughed, and Attila was satisfied: A tongue in the dust speaks louder than a thousand words.

The steppe has no room for diplomacy. It only has room for riding, killing, and taking. He who comes with words loses. He who leaves with blood remains in memory. Attila understood that ambassadors were mere fodder for dust. They brought parchment, but the wind tore it. They brought words, but the steppe swallowed them. They brought their tongues, but the Huns turned them into mincemeat.

Thus, many speeches ended in dust. Words useless, tongues useless, ambassadors useless. And Attila rode on without looking back. To him, they were nothing but pauses between battles, figures of fun with flapping mouths who, in the end, were as silent as everyone else.

## Every look a dagger

On the steppe, no glance was harmless. Eyes were weapons, sharper than knives, faster than arrows. Every glance was a dagger—either in your back or in your stomach. Attila knew this. He grew up in a world where you always had to sense whether someone was looking at you, and why.

Men in his camp rarely laughed honestly. Laughter was merely a curtain for the eyes. Eyes told you the truth. Some glittered greedily when gold was involved. Some stung coldly when envy burned. Some were empty because they had already decided to slaughter you that night. And some were so restless that they betrayed you more than any weapon.

Attila learned early on that he had to not only hear what men said, but also see how they looked at him. One look, too long, too short, too askance—that could be the beginning of the end. Brothers who laughed could have daggers in their eyes. Friends who drank could measure you. Even women who desired him could secretly have poison in their cups.

Every look a dagger – that's how he lived. He saw it on the steppe, he saw it in the tents, he saw it in battles. And he played the game back. His own eyes were knives. When he looked at someone, the man knew there was steel behind them. Attila's gaze was a weapon that didn't need a dagger in his back.

But that also made life miserable. No trust, no peace, just staring and weighing things up. Men went to sleep with their hands on their sword hilts, because they knew: One look at the wrong moment, and you'd never wake up again. Children grew up learning that you had to avoid eyes, that you couldn't look too long, because otherwise you were considered a provocation. Even the horses sensed the tension—they snorted when men looked too deeply into each other's eyes.

Attila took all of that and turned it around. He turned looks into tools. He could silence men with one look, make women drop their clothes with one look. He could say more with a look than with a hundred words. But he also knew: every look he received was a dagger he had to fend off. And he did it, every day, every night.

It was worse at night. During the day, you could still laugh, scream, and drink. But when the sun went down, when the fires faded, all that remained were your eyes. Eyes in the darkness, shining like blades. You never knew if they

were staring at you because they admired you or because they were considering stabbing you in the ribs.

Attila knew this game. He never slept deeply. His ear was to the wind, his hand on his sword. He knew: There is no silence on the steppe, only the waiting for the blow. And the eyes were the first harbingers. A man who looked at you too long in the dark was a man who wanted to rob you of sleep.

The Huns weren't a family, they were a pack. And in a pack, everyone tested the others to see if they could tear them apart. Brothers, cousins, friends—they all had blades in their eyes. They held them back as long as they had to. But in the dark, when the tents whispered and the dust settled, their eyes flashed, as if they were already testing how deep the dagger could go.

Some men no longer needed words. A glance was enough. Half a second too long, and you knew: Here lies hatred, here lies greed, here lies danger. Attila made a game of it. He stared back. Harder, longer, until the others lowered their eyes. His gaze was a sword that knew no sheath. Whoever could hold it was strong. Whoever looked away was already defeated.

But even he knew: every glance leaves scars. You can deflect a hundred daggers with your gaze, but eventually one will hit you. Not the blade, but the mistrust. A life in which every glance is an attack eats you away from the inside. Trust becomes a dead word. Closeness becomes a trap. You look into your brothers' eyes and ask yourself: Will they still be your brothers tomorrow—or your murderers?

That's how they lived. Huns who laughed, drank, fought—and stared like wolves at night. Eyes like blades in the darkness, always ready, always sharp. And Attila in the middle of it all, with his own gaze, harder than steel, but just as lonely.

Hunger eats away at you slowly. Your stomach contracts, your head grows dull, you weaken, bit by bit. But mistrust – that eats away at you faster. It doesn't go straight to your stomach; it goes straight to your heart, to your head. It makes your hands tremble, your eyes flicker. It makes every night shorter and every day harder. And on the steppe, mistrust was always louder than hunger.

Attila saw this early on. Men who still had meat in their tents died anyway because they didn't trust the others. They woke up every hour, grabbed their swords, stared into the shadows until their hearts pounded like drums. At some

point, their bodies simply toppled over—not because their stomachs were empty, but because their heads were overflowing with fear.

You can share hunger. A piece of meat, a bone, a sip of milk—and everyone survives a little longer. But you can't share mistrust. It grows the more you give. A man who doubts once will always doubt. And doubt is contagious. One look, one twitch, and suddenly ten men are staring at the same man as if he were already a traitor before he even breathes.

The Huns knew this. That's why they laughed so hard, drank so much, and fought so fiercely. They wanted to drown out the mistrust. But it was always there, like an animal growling in the shadows. Even brothers devoured each other. One wrong word, one sideways glance, and the knife was there. No hunger needed, just mistrust.

Attila was different. He devoured distrust instead of being devoured. He took it like poison, which made him stronger. He knew no one trusted him—so he built his power on it. He was the only one who said, "Trust no one." And because he lived it himself, they believed him. He was the eye of the storm. A dagger that already held all other daggers in its hand.

But even he felt it: mistrust makes you lonely. You sleep with your eyes open, you never speak honestly, you never hug anyone without thinking that a knife might slip into your back. And at some point, you realize you're fighting more with the shadows than with your enemies. But on the steppe, that was normal. Hunger kills slowly, mistrust quickly. And the Huns preferred to live fast.

Brothers are not a gift on the steppe; they are a risk. Blood alone does not make a man reliable. Blood only means that you share the same father—or mother. But in a world where every look is a dagger, your brother's dagger can cut deeper than your enemy's.

Attila learned this firsthand. Brothers laughed with him, rode with him, drank with him. But behind their eyes, there was always that spark: "Why him and not me?" Every victory he won was a blow to their vanity. Every cup he emptied was proof that he was stronger. And everyone knew that strength was all that mattered on the steppe. Brothers could drink with you—but they could also quench their thirst with your blood.

The Huns made no secret of it. Brothers fought each other, sometimes openly, sometimes in the shadows. There were nights when one lay dead in the dust, and in the morning all they said was, "He has fallen." Fallen—a nice word for a

knife in the back. No one asked. No one wanted to know for sure. In a world without trust, every death was plausible.

Attila knew: A brother riding beside you is never just a brother. He is always also a rival. He shares your blood, but he also wants your horse, your wife, your place by the fire. And if he says he doesn't want it, he's lying. Everyone wants something. The steppe teaches you this: Everything that glitters is wanted. Everything that is strong is hunted.

That's why Attila built his power not on brothers, but on fear. He knew he couldn't trust his family. But he also knew they feared him. And fear is stronger than blood. Fear never sleeps, fear never doubts. A brother who fears you will hesitate before he strikes. And that hesitation was Attila's protection.

But he too felt it, deep down: brothers without trust are a curse. They sit with you by the fire, and you know every look is a dagger. You hear their laughter, and you know it's hollow. You see their hands, and you know they're just waiting. A life among brothers wasn't a life of safety. It was a constant dance on knives, a dance that never ended until one fell.

An empire built on brothers, cousins, and friends doesn't break through its enemies; it breaks from within. Daggers in the back are quieter, but more deadly. A blow from the front can make you a hero. A stab from behind just makes you another carcass in the dust. Attila knew this better than anyone.

He had felt daggers in his back, even if they never quite hit him. A brother who handed him wine might already be thinking of adding poison. A cousin who laughed with him might have drawn a dagger in his dreams. And every spark of suspicion was real—because the steppe taught that greed is always stronger than blood ties.

Attila turned it into a weapon. He expected the dagger in his back, and therefore he never caught it off guard. His eyes were fire—they burned through lies, they melted masks. A man could drink with him, but he couldn't hide it when he was already dreaming of the dagger. Attila saw it before the other knew it. His gaze was a flame that exposed everything.

But that didn't make him invulnerable—only tougher. He knew: sooner or later, every man will be betrayed. The only question was: could you strike faster? You couldn't always prevent a dagger in the back, but you could prevent it from going deep. Attila kept his back straight, but his hand always on his sword.

And so he lived: fire in his gaze, daggers everywhere. He built his empire not on trust, but on fear, on strength, on the certainty that he had the tougher gaze. Everyone who looked at him felt the fire, and every dagger in his back trembled before it struck. That was his advantage. That was his protection.

But deep down, he knew: A life full of daggers in the back is not a life of peace. It is a life on a burning field, constantly lurking, constantly fighting. But peace was never the goal. The goal was power. The goal was victory. The goal was for his fire to burn more fiercely than any knife that dared to pierce his back.

Every look was a dagger, yes. But Attila turned his gaze into a burning sword. And as long as he lived, he burned the daggers before they struck him.

## The night devours the riders

The steppe at night was no place for romantics. No moon, no stars, only darkness so thick it crept into your lungs. Men disappeared into it like insects in tar. The night devoured riders, slowly, greedily, without you noticing.

Attila knew this darkness. It was worse than any battle, worse than any hunger. In the dark, you were small, no matter how big your horse. Your breathing was too loud, your heartbeat too heavy. Even the horses became nervous, snorting, pawing the ground, as if they knew something invisible was creeping around them.

The Huns had no torches, no lamps. Fire only made you visible, a target. So they rode blindly, trusting in the neighing, in the wind, in the soft clinking of iron. But the night laughed at trust. It made every man uncertain, made him see things that weren't there: shadows, figures, eyes in the grass. Some heard voices, some saw ghosts.

Attila knew: The night was the true enemy. Not the Romans, not the Germanic tribes – the night. It took your eyesight, it took your courage, it devoured your security bit by bit. Men who screamed like wolves by day crouched like children by night, listening to every rustle, drawing their knives at every cough. The steppe became a single stomach, and the riders were just meat in it.

But Attila rode on. He threw himself against the night as he threw himself against any enemy. He felt the fear, but he didn't let it win. "The night devours us," he once said, "but we devour back." And his men laughed, even as their

teeth chattered in the darkness. They knew: If the night wanted to swallow them, it would be with Attila at the head, who, even riding in the darkness, looked like a demon with fire in his eyes.

At night, the steppe wasn't empty. It was full. Full of shadows that moved as if they had bones. Shadows that bore names. Some swore they saw their dead brothers riding beside them, their eyes like glowing coals, their smiles crooked, their voices shaky. Others saw women long since lain in the dust, whispering in the dark, as if they wanted the body once more.

The Huns rarely talked about it because they knew that words made the shadows stronger. But everyone had seen them. Horses would neigh suddenly, for no reason. Men would grab swords, striking at the void as if someone were there. And when asked, they would simply say, "A shadow." No further explanation. On the steppe, the word was enough. Everyone knew what it meant.

Attila himself was not immune to it. He, too, sometimes saw them, the shadows with faces. He recognized men he had slain with his own hands. They rode beside him, silent, their mouths red. He recognized brothers who had bled to death in their tents. They grinned as if they had known that one day they would return to haunt him.

But Attila was not like the others. He saw the shadows, yes—but he didn't fear them. He accepted them as part of the steppe, as part of the night. "If the dead are accompanying us, then at least they're riding in the right direction," he once said. His men laughed nervously, but they knew he meant it.

The shadows had names because they were real. Not fantasy, not a dream. In the steppe, everything was alive, even that which had already rotted. Every blow, every scream, every burned tent – it lingered in the grass, rising like smoke at night, forming figures that rode along. The Huns didn't call them ghosts. They called them memories. And memories were sometimes worse than any battle.

For the shadows whispered. They called names, they laughed, they cried. Sometimes it seemed as if they wanted revenge. Sometimes just companionship. But always they made the night tighter, heavier. Every man who rode knew: There is more than just darkness out there. The shadows are out there, and they know your name.

Horses were dumber than humans, the Romans said. But that was a lie. Horses can smell things humans would rather deny. At night, they were the first to know something was wrong. Their nostrils flared, their heads bobbed, their hooves pounded the ground. They snorted as if an enemy were right on their heels, even though neither eye could see.

The Huns trusted their horses more than their own brothers. A brother could betray you, a horse never could. A horse wasn't afraid without reason. When its ears pinned back, there was something in the darkness, even if it was just a shadow crouching too low in the grass. And when a horse neighed in the middle of the night, men would wake up, sweat on their brows, hands on their swords. They knew: The animal doesn't lie.

Attila himself listened to his stallion's breathing like a drum. Every change in rhythm was a sign. The stallion smelled things no human could. Blood that had already dried. Smoke that the wind had carried for miles. Or the damned shadows that crept across the steppe without flesh or bone.

Many men laughed at their own fear, but not at that of their horses. A man could drink to give himself courage, could say, "It's just wind." But when the horse shied, there was no laughter. Everyone fell silent, every heart beat faster. Horses were the mirror of the steppe. They showed what people denied because they were too cowardly to see it.

And sometimes, when the horses sensed too many shadows, they bolted. An entire camp could end in chaos—men shouting, animals trampling, dust swallowing everything. In the morning, someone would lie dead in the dirt, trampled not by enemies, but by their own horse. Then they knew: The night had claimed them again, and the horse had known it first.

Attila accepted this. For him, horses were more than animals. They were the seers of the steppe, the true eyes in the darkness. And he knew: When a horse trembled in the dark, it didn't matter whether you believed or not. The night had come, and it was eating.

The steppe silently devoured men. By day, you died with a roar, with blood in the sand, with swords that sang. At night, it was different. Then you disappeared without a scream, as if the earth itself had swallowed you. No echo, no bang—just a missing breath in the chorus of the sleeping.

The Huns knew this. One lay down, drank the last sip, belched – and in the morning his place was empty. No blood, no struggle, no clue. Only dust,

smooth, untouched, as if the man had never existed. His friends cursed, his brothers stared into the grass. Some said wolves had taken him. Others said the shadows. Attila knew: It was night.

The night needed no weapon. It only needed darkness. Men stumbled into pits, drowned in rivers they couldn't see. They rode in the wrong direction and never returned. Some simply ran, in their sleep or in their madness, and disappeared into a sea of grass that swallowed every footstep. If you looked, you sometimes found a trace—a shoe, a knife, a piece of cloth. But never the man.

The Huns accepted it. They cursed briefly, then tightened their belts. There was no room for prolonged mourning on the steppe. "The night has devoured him," they said, and they moved on. Because everyone knew: tomorrow it could be their turn.

But Attila saw more. He understood that the night didn't just take men—it took the courage of the survivors. Every missing man left a hole, not in the camp, but in their minds. Men spoke more quietly, slept worse, drank more. They heard footsteps in the dark where there were none. They smelled blood where there was only grass. Each one who disappeared weakened the others before they themselves were killed.

And Attila took advantage of this. He didn't speak of the disappeared. He left no names, no stories. Whoever disappeared was dead. Finished. No scream, no memory. Thus, he robbed the night of its triumph. It could devour men, but it couldn't give them space in the camp. The dust was their grave, and Attila moved on.

So men disappeared without a cry, night after night. The steppe took them, and the Huns rode on as if nothing had happened. But everyone knew: One day, the night will consume you too.

There were nights when the steppe wasn't just dark—it was black, so black that even the sky no longer breathed. No stars, no moon, nothing. Just a weight lying on you like a wet blanket, slowly suffocating you. Men looked up, searching for light, and found only emptiness. And this emptiness sapped more courage than any sword.

Attila rode on nights like these, too. He never rested. But he felt that even his men diminished when the sky was black. They slumped in the saddle, their shoulders heavy, their eyes empty. They no longer spoke, no longer laughed,

they only chewed on their fear as if it were a tough piece of meat stuck in their throats.

The black sky was a mirror. It showed you nothing—and that was precisely what made you weak. You saw no trace, no path, no hope. Only blackness that told you: "You are alone, and no one will save you." Many men were broken by this nothingness. Not by the enemy, not by hunger, but by the sky that no longer offered anything.

Attila, however, treated this sky like an opponent. He stared into the darkness as if to challenge it. "Eat me if you can," he once murmured, and his stallion snorted as if he understood. For him, the black sky was not a punishment, but a test. Whoever rode on when there was nothing left truly belonged to the steppe.

And so this sky, too, became a part of the Huns. They cursed it, they feared it, but they rode on nonetheless. For the steppe was merciless—and only those who rode through the black void themselves had the right to see the light again in the morning.

When the sky turned black, night didn't just consume the riders. It consumed hope. But Attila bit back. And as long as he stayed in the saddle, his men had no choice: They rode, even when they could no longer see, even when the sky itself wanted to swallow them.

## Cities of smoke and fear

Cities were foreign bodies to the Huns. Stones that towered too high, walls that looked like prisons, roads built according to alien rules. To Attila, they were the playthings of men who believed they could lock out the steppe. But the steppe knows no gates, no keys. It creeps through every crack, and when it comes, it brings smoke and fear with it.

The Huns hated the smell of cities. It was sweet and rotten, like meat left in fat for too long. Markets were full of spices, wine, and rotten fruit. In between, there was the stench of people stuck too close together, like rats in a cage. Attila wrinkled his nose whenever he saw a city. "It doesn't smell of life," he said. "It smells of simmering fear."

And fear boiled within these walls, always. The Romans built their cities on order, on laws, on trade. But as soon as the Huns' hooves appeared on the horizon, everything crumbled. Merchants packed up their stalls, women ran into cellars, children screamed, men locked doors as if boards were stronger than iron. The cities were large, loud, proud – and yet they crumbled faster than a bone in the dust.

Attila knew: A city burns more easily than it is built. A few torches, a few arrows, and proud houses turn to smoke. And smoke is the true breath of a city when it dies. It drifts through the streets, settles on faces, and turns every breath into a punishment. Men who thought they were masters stumble coughing through the flames. Women no longer cry—they only wheeze.

The fear in the cities was louder than any bell. It beat in hearts, it made men run who would otherwise have shouted orders. It made emperors tremble, it made soldiers desert. Attila saw this and grinned: Cities are nothing but fear cast in stone. And smoke is the knife that softens it again.

Walls were the pride of cities. Huge stones, stacked like a cry of defiance against the steppe. "You're safe in here," they said. But walls can't breathe. They are dead. And everything that lives behind them will eventually be suffocated by this death.

Attila understood this immediately. Walls are prisons for those who build them. Inside, people pile up like cattle in a stable. They lose the space, the air, the freedom. They think they are protected – but in reality, they are already sitting in their grave, only the lid isn't on yet.

The Romans boasted about their walls. High, thick, strong. Attila laughed. "If walls were so strong, there would be no birds," he said. Because birds fly over them, fire climbs over them, and men like him always find a weak spot. Walls are slow, the steppe is fast. Walls are heavy, the steppe is light. Walls wait—and the steppe comes.

He knew: every wall contains fear. The higher it is built, the greater the fear of those who live behind it. A man without fear needs no wall. Only those who tremble stack stones to the sky. And when the Huns came, this fear was proven. Men ran to the walls, looked out, saw dust, hooves, arrows. And they realized: the stones don't breathe for them.

The Huns loved walls because they saw them burning. They erected ladders, they pushed towers, they set fire to them. Walls that had lasted decades fell in

hours. And when they fell, it wasn't just stone that broke, it was the will of those who lived behind them that broke.

Attila knew: Walls protect no one. They are merely monuments of fear. And when the smoke rises, when the arrows fly, walls reveal their true face—lifeless, cold, useless.

No stonemason, no emperor, no damned architect rebuilt cities as thoroughly as fire. Fire was the true architect, and Attila loved his work. Where others built walls, fire built lines. Where others raised temples, fire flattened them. Where others paved streets, fire painted black veins into the ground.

A torch was enough. An arrow with oil, a spark in the hay. That's all it took. Entire cities that had taken decades to rise took only hours to sink. And when they burned, they revealed what they truly were: nothing more than wood, straw, and the fear of the people who lived within them.

Attila knew: Fire makes people honest. It takes away the jewelry, the stucco ceilings, the painted walls, the marble statues—and reduces everything to ash. A palace and a hut look the same once the flames are out. Fire doesn't discriminate. It consumes everything. And that's precisely what made it the greatest weapon.

The Huns loved fire almost as much as their horses. They laughed when roofs creaked, they drank when flames leaped. For them, the cracking of beams was music, better than any lyre. And the smoke that rose was like a banner saying, "Here we were."

The Romans hated it because they thought their cities were eternal. But fire taught them that eternity is just a word. A city that had stood for a hundred years was nothing more than embers in one night. And in those embers lay people who believed that walls and temples would save them.

Attila often grinned when he saw the flames. "That is the true architect," he said. "All others are just bricklayers." Fire was faster, more honest, more brutal. It didn't build for eternity—it built for truth. And the truth was: Nothing lasts. Everything burns.

Smoke takes time. It rises, twists, spreads across rooftops, creeps through alleys. Fear is faster. It runs before the first fire is even ignited. It leaps from house to house like an invisible fire that needs no flames. Attila knew: Smoke destroys walls, fear destroys people.

The Huns didn't need to fire arrows to sow fear. Sometimes the dust from their hooves was enough. A village saw the riders approaching, and their knees trembled. Doors slammed shut, children screamed, dogs whimpered. No sword had yet been drawn, no house burned—but the fear was there, heavier than smoke.

Fear turns men into cowards. A soldier with armor and shield can look like a god as long as he believes he is strong. But when fear grips him, he is nothing but flesh in iron, rattling with cold. Attila saw it again and again: legions dissolving into dust long before the blood was shed. Fear devoured their ranks from within, faster than any blade from without.

Women in cities were the best mirrors. They were the first to sense fear. Even before the fire was ablaze, they grabbed children and luggage, ran into cellars and catacombs. Their eyes rolled, as if they could already hear the hooves in their dreams. Fear turned them into shadows of themselves, stripping them of all dignity. And men who saw this were doubly broken. For if the women were already wavering, what was their strength worth?

Attila knew how to channel fear. Sometimes he let only a few houses burn, only a few heads roll. Fear itself took care of the rest. It ran faster than smoke through the streets, crept into beds, temples, and palaces. And in the end, the people left their cities without him having to tear down all the walls. Fear moved faster, deeper, and more lastingly.

And once fear took hold, fire was no longer necessary. Men no longer fought; they negotiated. Women no longer screamed; they begged. Children no longer laughed; they whimpered. A city drowning in fear has already fallen—even if it still stands.

Smoke eventually dissipates. It hangs heavy in the alleys, burns the lungs, stings the eyes – but after days, weeks, the wind carries it away. It remains as soot on walls, as a smell in clothes, but it is finite. Fear does not. Fear continues to eat long after the smoke has disappeared. It nests like rats in cellars, it returns in dreams, it remains in the flesh.

Attila knew this. Smoke was only the sign, the flag, the message: "Here we were." But fear was the seed. It continued to grow long after the Huns had disappeared. Children who once lost their laughter never found it again. Women who once shivered in the cellar woke up years later, drenched in sweat. Men who once ran away carried the taste of cowardice to their graves.

A city could be rebuilt. New walls, new markets, new temples. But the fear Attila left behind could not be repaired. It consumed generations. It belittled people, even when they built new houses. Every stone laid bore the memory: "Here it burned. Here we trembled."

That's why fear was more powerful than fire. Fire destroys, fear dominates. Attila understood: He didn't have to reduce every city to ashes. Sometimes it was enough to let them taste what might come. Fear did the rest. It became his invisible army, moving faster than his cavalry, already there before he arrived.

And so the smoke remained in the air, while fear remained in the heart. Cities of smoke and fear—that wasn't an image, that was reality. Attila was not a builder, not an emperor, not a god. He was the man who left smoke behind and planted fear. And that was enough to make Rome tremble even before his hooves reached the streets.

## The emperor trembles behind walls

An emperor without courage is just a man in a suit. The Romans sewed their emperors in gold, placed crowns on their heads, and had trumpets sounded when they went to the bathroom. But Attila knew: When an emperor trembles, he looks like any other bastard naked. And Rome had many trembling emperors.

They sat behind walls, thick stones, thick doors, thick guards. Everything was thick—except for their hearts. It beat like a rabbit when the steppe drew near. An emperor could command legions, could write laws, could invoke God—but when Attila's horsemen kicked up dust on the horizon, he sweated like a pig in summer.

Attila laughed at the trembling. "A man who needs walls is already defeated," he said. And he was right. Walls are merely a confession that you are afraid. A Hun had no wall except his horse, no crown except his courage. And yet the emperors trembled before him as if he had fire in his breath.

The palaces were full of mirrors, full of gold, full of servants who saw the trembling but said nothing. Every step the emperor took echoed in halls larger than entire villages. But when he was alone, at night, he heard the silence, and in that silence, he heard the hooves. They were still far away—but in his mind

they were already there. Hoofbeats, the sound of swords, screams. No sleep, no peace, only fear.

Attila knew he didn't have to kill every emperor. It was enough if they trembled. Because a trembling emperor weakens an empire. Soldiers see it, women feel it, children inherit it. A trembling emperor is like a rotten beam in a roof—at some point he falls, and everything collapses with him.

So Attila rode against emperors who boasted like lions and trembled like dogs. And he grinned because he knew: Behind walls, no emperor is a king. Behind walls, he is merely a prisoner of his own fear.

Gold was the emperors' finery. Crowns, swords, thrones, coins—everything glittered. They bathed their fear in precious metal, as if it could drown their trembling. But Attila knew: gold cannot hide trembling. It only glitters over it, like a whore covering her bruises with makeup.

The emperors held audiences, wearing golden robes, rings on each fingertip, and crowns so heavy their necks buckled. They spoke of power, of eternity, of Rome, which was immortal. But upon closer inspection, their hands trembled. The chalice swayed, the ring clinked against the next, the crown wobbled on the sweaty head.

Attila laughed at the gold. To him, it was just metal that melted in fire like any other. He could plunder ten cities, collect a hundred tons of gold—and yet no piece weighed as much as the gaze of an emperor who feared him. Gold was nothing compared to fear. Gold was bribery, jewelry, a lie. Fear was truth.

The Romans threw gold at Attila like one throws bones at dogs. They thought he would eat it, calm down, obey. But Attila saw through the game. He took the gold, yes—he had it counted, stacked, and glittered in the light. But he grinned because he knew: every sack of gold only meant the emperor trembled more. The strong don't pay. The weak buy time. And time was all they wanted, because they knew Attila was coming.

He sometimes told his men that the emperors' gold was soft. "It feels like butter," he said, "because it's in the hands of weaklings." The Huns laughed, bashing each other's skulls with gold cups, as if to prove it wasn't sacred. To them, it was just booty. To the emperors, it was their last skin.

But no matter how hard they tried, gold couldn't hide their trembling. A man in the dirt, without a coin but holding his sword with a firm hand, was stronger

than an emperor on a golden throne whose fingers clattered. Attila saw that. And Rome knew it too, deep down, even if they never said it out loud.

Walls were meant to be protection. Thick stones, cold fortresses, built by slaves, paid for with gold. But Attila knew: walls echo with the heartbeat of those hiding behind them. And this sound was louder than any gong, louder than any horn. A trembling heart makes the walls tremble, as if they themselves were trying to flee.

The emperor could hide, could place soldiers between himself and the steppe, could close gates and raise bridges. But his heartbeat betrayed him. Everyone nearby heard it, even if only subconsciously. Servants felt it when they passed goblets. Women felt it when they lay in his bed. Guards felt it when they led him through dark corridors. An emperor whose heart stumbled diminished everyone around him.

Attila knew: heartbeats don't lie. Words can feign strength, gold can simulate power. But a racing heart is the naked truth. And when the walls echoed with it, the entire city was rotten. The citizens smelled the fear long before the first sword fell. They saw it in the soldiers' eyes, they heard it in the trembling of the commands.

The Huns made fun of it. They rode around walls, shaking the ground, raising the dust. Inside stood the emperor, drenched in sweat, his heart pounding like a drum. Attila laughed: "Do you hear that? Not our drums—his heart." And his men laughed along, knowing that even the thickest stones couldn't stop the trembling.

The Romans called their walls insurmountable. Attila called them amplifiers. They amplified the trembling, they made the emperor's heart louder until everyone could hear it. Walls were supposed to provide security, but they only made the fear more pronounced. Attila knew: A wall can be torn down. A trembling heart tears itself apart.

Thus, the walls meant to save Rome became drums upon which the Huns danced. Their sound was not made of stone, but of fear. And the emperor sitting behind them was merely the pacesetter of his own downfall.

A crown is meant to demonstrate power. Golden hoops, precious stones, and symbols carved into it meant to say: "Here sits God on earth." But Attila grinned whenever he saw a crown. For he knew: The crown sweats along with the head that wears it. It can't conceal the trembling; it intensifies it.

The emperors wore it when they were afraid. Like a child pulling a blanket over their head to make the monsters go away. But the crown only made the monsters bigger. It shone in the candlelight, while the emperor grew paler beneath it. Sweat ran down his forehead, crept into his eyes, dripped into the gold. And suddenly you saw how weak he was. Gold that shines while the skin trembles beneath it—that's not power, that's a farce.

Attila told his men he once saw an emperor whose crown was so heavy he could barely hold his head up. "The gold weighed him down, as if it were trying to strangle him," he said. The Huns laughed, belched, and spat into the fire. To them, a crown was just a useless helmet, a piece of jewelry that made you weaker instead of stronger.

For on the steppe, no one wore a crown. They wore scars. And scars didn't sweat, they told stories. Every scar was a crown, and it shone not with precious stones, but with the blood of one's survival. Attila knew: This was true power. Not a ring of gold, but a body covered with cuts that said, "I'm still here."

The crown sweated, always. It grew hot when fear gripped the emperor. It slipped when he raised his hands to defend himself. It almost slid off his head when he writhed in his sleep. And it made every man who saw it suspicious: "If even the crown isn't secure, how can the empire stand firm?"

Attila understood the symbolism. He knew that a crown didn't make one strong, but rather made trembling more pronounced. Every precious stone was like an eye, reflecting the emperor's weakness. Every engraving was a mockery, carved into the gold, which didn't resist the sweating of the head beneath it.

Thus, the crown remained the most visible symbol of fear. It was meant to demonstrate power—but it revealed sweat. And sweat betrayed more than a thousand decrees.

A throne is meant to represent strength. A block of gold, ivory, and stone—high, heavy, and unshakable. Men kneel before it, women throw themselves into the dust, messengers tremble when they look at it. But Attila knew: No throne stands on power. A throne stands on fear. Fear that the man sitting on it would otherwise appear too small.

The emperor sat on his throne as if he were disappearing into it. He held on to the arms as if they were crutches. And every time he spoke, the throne trembled. Not because he was alive, but because the emperor's legs wobbled,

the wood creaked, the gold vibrated. A throne amplifies what is there—and if there is only fear, it shows fear.

Attila laughed at thrones. For him, a saddle was worth more. A saddle held you when your horse raced, when arrows flew around you, when blood splashed in your face. A saddle was real. A throne was just a chair for men who could no longer ride. Men who preferred to sit still because they knew the world outside would devour them.

The Romans built thrones like temples. Huge frames, adorned with lions, eagles, and angels. Everything was meant to scream power. But the Huns only heard the creaking. They saw the sweat on the seat, they smelled the fear trapped in it like urine in an old carpet. A throne wasn't a symbol of strength—it was a prison that looked like a monument.

Attila once told his men he could never sit on a throne. "My balls would rot if I sat down," he said, and the Huns laughed, beer spurting from their mouths. For them, it was clear: A man who rules rides. A man who sits rots.

Thus, the throne was the last laugh of the steppe. An emperor on a golden chair, surrounded by walls, with a sweating crown, with a pounding heart – and outside rode Attila, free, stinking of blood, without gold, but with power. Because true power doesn't sit. True power rides.

And so the throne remained the symbol of an empire that was already dying. A throne of fear, a man of trembling, an emperor without courage. Attila needed no walls, no crowns, no thrones. He needed only the dust, the hooves, the iron. And that was enough to make the emperor, behind walls, a prisoner of his own fear.

## A throne of sweat and blood

Attila had no throne of gold. He had no palace with marble columns, no carpets that smelled of roses, no mirrors that reflected his own face in a softened light. His throne was sweat and blood. It stank, it was sticky, it wobbled. But it held. And that was more than the emperors of Rome could claim.

The Romans built thrones that looked like thrones of the gods. Lion heads of bronze, eagles with silver wings, velvet sewn together by a hundred virgins. All show. All theater. Attila's "throne" was a saddle, cracked from the sweat of his

stallion, dark from the blood that had dripped onto it. It stank of iron, of animal, of filth. But it was real. He carried it through battles, not through audiences.

Sweat was his crown. Every drop that ran down his brow was proof that he worked, that he lived, that he wasn't hiding behind walls. Blood was his insignia. Not painted, not symbolic, but real—the blood of his enemies, his friends, sometimes even his own. It colored his throne, it made him harder than any gilded thing in the palace.

The Huns laughed at emperors who sat on cushions. "Their asses are softer than their hearts," Attila once said, and his men roared. For them, a throne was nothing. A chair. A shitty stool. Power didn't sit. Power rode, power sweated, power bled.

And so Attila's throne became something no artist could ever paint: a saddle full of cracks, soaked with dirt, blood, and sweat. It didn't shine, it didn't sparkle, it didn't smell of incense. But it was alive. It moved with the horse, rocking with every breath, trembling with every blow. It was a throne that didn't make you look taller, but forced you to be taller.

That was the difference. An emperor sat and hoped his throne made him look strong. Attila rode, and his throne tested him every damn day. He had to bear the weight, he had to endure the pain. And that's precisely why he was the king. A king of sweat and blood, not velvet and lies.

The emperors sat on velvet. Soft, warm, damn comfortable. They slumped like fat cats being fed by slaves. Velvet carried their backsides while they talked about wars waged by others. But Attila didn't know velvet. His "velvet" was scars. And they told more stories than any golden fabric could ever bear.

Scars were his seat cushion. Harsh lines on his skin, each a memory. A sword thrust that almost ripped him open. An arrow that lodged in his shoulder until he pulled it out himself, with his bare teeth. Cuts, blisters, scrapes—everything was there. The steppe was his tailor, and blood was the thread.

When he sat in his saddle, he felt every scar. Some still hurt, some itched, some were numb. But they reminded him: You're alive because you didn't sit like an emperor. You're alive because you rode, because you bled, because you eat pain instead of grapes.

The Huns admired scars. They were stories worn on one's skin. Not fairy tales, not lies—only truth, hard and visible. A man without scars was a man who hadn't yet lived. An emperor with smooth skin was nothing to them but a child in man's clothing. Attila, on the other hand, was a book full of cuts, and each cut was a chapter.

No velvet could replace that. Velvet softened, velvet seduced, velvet deceived. Scars never deceived. They told you that you'd lain in the dust before, that you'd bled before, and yet you were still sitting here. And if your "throne" was made of scars, then you were stronger than any emperor who had velvet under his ass.

Attila grinned at the thought. "Velvet is for weaklings," he said. "Scars are my velvet." And he meant it. For every crack in his skin was harder than an entire empire built solely on fabric and decoration.

For the Romans, the throne was an altar. Men knelt there, priests spoke there, and oaths were taken. All bullshit. Attila's altar was his saddle. Not polished, not decorated, not worshipped. A piece of leather, soaked with sweat, soaked with blood, hardened by the sun as bone. He sat on it, he lived on it, and he almost died on it.

The saddle took everything. It carried him when he rode for days, without sleep, without rest. It took his weight, the weight of his weapons, the weight of his prey. It absorbed the rain when the sky vomited, it dried when the sun burned. And it took blood. A lot of blood. Enemy blood, friend blood, sometimes even his own. Every stain remained. Every stain was a sacrifice.

That's why the saddle was an altar. An altar that smelled not of incense, but of horse, of iron, of dirt. An altar on which no gods sat, but a man who knew he was mortal—and precisely for that reason, king. Attila didn't need priests murmuring. The dust murmured enough. He didn't need prayers. The sweat of his men was prayer enough.

The Huns saw it the same way. When they died, they wanted to die in the saddle. No bed, no carpet, no throne. The saddle was their altar, and death on it was the only dignified death. A man who fell from his horse might have had courage, but he had no luck. A man who died in the saddle became a legend.

Attila understood this more deeply than anyone. His saddle was not just leather and iron. It was a memory, a throne, a sacrificial bench. He didn't kneel

before it—he sat on it, he rode on it, he bled on it. And every time he heard the leather creak, he knew: This is more honest than any cathedral in Rome.

For the saddle knew him. It bore his scars, his falls, his victories. It was the altar that always welcomed him, no matter how dirty, no matter how bloody he was. And that was more religion than any emperor ever understood.

A Roman throne had steps. Marble steps, polished to a shine, from the dust that had fallen before them. Steps on which priests sang, ambassadors sweated, supplicants whined. White, shining, clean as a lie. Attila once saw such a throne – and he laughed. "Clean stone is dead stone," he said. "Steps without blood are worthless."

His steps were different. They weren't made of marble, but of bodies. Men who had fallen for him. Enemies he crushed. Friends who lifted him up, even when they themselves lay in the dust. Each step was flesh and blood, and he stepped on it, not with sandals, but with boots that still stank of iron.

Blood stained the steps red, not evenly, but in splashes, streaks, and crusts. No architect could paint it, no artist could carve it. Only the sword could create such patterns. And Attila knew: these patterns were more honest than any ornament. One red print said more than a thousand Roman engravings.

The Huns understood this. For them, blood wasn't dirt to be wiped away. Blood was a memory, blood was proof. It was the only seal that wouldn't break. Treaties are torn apart, words blow away, gold melts—blood remains. Even when it turns black and hard, it still tells the story that someone fell here.

Attila's "throne" thus stood on steps that were never white. Every battle made them higher, every defeat made them wider. He didn't need an architect; he only needed his next opponent. He built the steps for him with his own body.

Sometimes, when he sat alone at night, he looked at the stains. He smelled them, he remembered. Every stain had a face, a scream, a name. Friends, enemies, brothers—it didn't matter. They all stained the steps. And that was more honest than any damned palace in Rome.

For power did not grow from marble. Power grew from blood. And a throne without blood was just a chair. Attila's throne was more—because it was alive, because it stank, because it dripped.

A Roman emperor bathed in rosewater. Slaves scrubbed the sweat from his body and perfumed his skin until he smelled of lilies. Attila bathed in the stench. And he was king in it.

His throne stank of horse, of leather, of blood, of men who hadn't washed for days, of wine that had been spilled and licked up. It was a stench that crept into the skin, into the hair, into the teeth. A smell that wouldn't go away, no matter how much rain fell. But that was precisely what made him real.

The stench was a memory. It said: Here, people rode. Here, people killed. Here, people drank, bled, and fucked. Here was life, raw, unvarnished, without curtains. An emperor could hide behind incense, Attila couldn't. He was his own smell. When he entered a tent, everyone knew immediately: The king was here. Not because of trumpets, not because of fanfares—because of the stench that marched before him like a banner.

The Huns loved it. For them, it was home. The smell of sweat and blood was the steppe itself. It told them they were still alive. It told them their king was no different from them—he stank just as much, perhaps worse. But that was precisely what made him greater. No man who smelled of roses could lead them. Only one who breathed the same filth as they did.

Attila knew: stench is more honest than any symbol. It doesn't betray you. It doesn't hide you. It is you. And when you wear it, you wear your history. That's why his throne wasn't a clean chair in a marble hall, but a stinking saddle, soaked with blood, laced with sweat.

A king in the stench, yes. But a king who lived, who rode, who took. And as long as the stench remained, everyone knew: Attila was here. Attila was real. Attila was king – not despite, but because of the stench.

## When horses don't know peace

Horses were the soul of the Huns. But souls don't rest when they've smelled too much blood. The horses of the steppe knew no rest. Their hooves pawed the ground, even when there was no enemy. Their nostrils flared, even when the wind brought only grass. They were like their riders: restless, harried, always at war with silence.

Attila understood this better than anyone else. His stallion was never still. Even in his sleep, his muscles twitched as if he were still running, still fleeing, still hunting. He could barely hold the animal when the night became too quiet. Horses hate silence. They know that something lurks behind the silence. They sense more, they hear more, they remember things that humans have long forgotten.

Some Romans believed the Huns had bewitched their horses. "The animals are sick, possessed," they said. But that was just their fear speaking. The truth was: The Huns lived so closely with the horses that the animals ate their restlessness like fodder. They sensed when a rider couldn't sleep, they sensed the distrust that hung in every camp. And they made it their own.

The Huns loved that. A horse that knows no rest is a horse that carries you onward. It doesn't fall into lethargy, it doesn't sleep deeply, it doesn't forget that the steppe can bite at any moment. A calm horse is a dead horse. A restless horse is a survivor.

Attila once said, "My horses are my drums. They beat even when I'm silent." And it was true. Their hooves were music, a ceaseless beat that told the Huns: There is no standstill. Rest is just another word for death.

This is how they lived—riders on horses who knew no rest. Always further, ever faster, always in conflict with the steppe that bore them. And as long as the horses remained restless, so too did the Huns.

You don't just hear hooves outside. You hear hooves in your head. If you ride across the steppe long enough, they pound into your skull like drums that never stop. Boom, boom, boom. Every beat a heartbeat, every footstep a reminder that you must keep going. There's no rest.

Attila's men said they heard hooves even in their sleep. No dream was silent. There was always this thunder, soft or loud, near or far. Some woke up

drenched in sweat, convinced an attack was already underway. But there was only the steppe. No enemy. Only the echo of their own restlessness.

Attila grinned at this. For him, the hooves were music. Not a sweet sound, not a lyre, not a choir. But raw drums that made the blood boil. He said: "As long as you hear the hooves, you are alive. When silence comes, you are dead." And the Huns believed it because they felt it.

The Romans hated this sound. For them, it was a harbinger of doom. Hours before the Huns reached the walls, they heard the thunder. Not just in their ears, but also in their hearts. It made their hands tremble, their commands stammer. It shattered their courage like glass. For hooves didn't just herald riders—they heralded fear.

And the Huns knew how to use it. They sometimes rode in circles, shaking the ground, raising the dust until their hooves sounded like a thousand drums. Inside the cities, men sweated long before a sword was drawn. The sound alone was a weapon.

But for the Huns, it was home. They slept by it, they woke by it, they fought by it. Hooves like drums in their skulls – that was the pulse of their lives. Restless, brutal, incessant. And as long as it continued to roar, they knew: they hadn't been swallowed up yet.

A horse knows no mercy. It runs until it dies. It eats when it's lucky. It kicks when it's harassed. But compassion? Never. Horses are not human. They don't pretend, they don't pray, they don't apologize. And that's precisely what made them the Huns' best allies.

Attila knew that a horse doesn't love you. It carries you because you force it, because you're stronger, because you ride it until it understands it has no choice. But that's precisely why it was honest. No lies, no flattery. Just raw power, which you guide—or which throws you off if you're weak.

The Romans treated horses like jewelry. Tamed, fed oats, groomed, and stroked. They wanted to see mercy in the animal, as if it were a dog licking your hand. The Huns laughed at this. For them, a horse was a weapon, not a pet. A horse that threw you was testing you. A horse that kicked you was testing your worthiness. Only those who came back, only those who mounted it again, were riders.

And they didn't need mercy. They needed teeth, hooves, and muscles that would hold out even when the sky was falling. They needed animals that ran when blood spurted, that didn't flinch when heads rolled. Horses that didn't question, didn't think, just ran.

Attila himself had seen more horses die than men. He once said: "A horse dies more honestly than a human. It falls, it breathes heavily, it looks at you – and then it's over. No lies, no words. Just the end." And he respected that. More than any whisper of a priest.

No horse shows mercy. But that's precisely what made them the gods of the steppe. They were cold, they were tough, they were honest. And whoever rode with them became like them.

Death never sleeps. He never rests, never puts his feet up, never takes a day off. He runs, always, everywhere. Just like the horses of the Huns. Restless, hungry, endless. When you saw them running, you knew: That was death itself, on four legs, with nostrils that exhaled smoke and eyes that burned like coal.

Attila loved this image. "My horses are death wearing hooves," he said. And it was true. They raced across the steppe, through forests, across rivers, as if no obstacle were strong enough. They didn't stop; they didn't know "enough." When they fell, it was mid-race, with broken legs, with blood in their mouths. But they ran until there was nothing left.

The Romans didn't understand this. Their horses had stables, rest, and breaks. They were fed, pampered, and massaged. But what good did it do? A Roman horse was fat, soft, and slow. A Hunnic horse was thin, wiry, and hard. It ate roots, drank mud, and bit into bark, and yet it kept going. Because it knew no rest. Because rest was death, and death knows no rest.

The Huns felt it in every gallop. Every beat of the hooves was like a clock counting down. No standstill, no respite, no mercy. And they absorbed it. They themselves became restless, like their horses, like death. Sleep was just a trick for them, a brief deception. For they knew that the hooves would be pounding again before their eyes had even closed.

Some said Attila never slept. He rode day and night as if he were a horse himself. Perhaps that was an exaggeration, perhaps not. But the truth was: his empire never rested. Because his horses never rested. Because death never rests.

And so the restless gallop became a symbol. Not just for the Huns, but for life itself. A race that doesn't stop until you're lying in the dirt. Restless, like death, and honest, as only the steppe can be.

Stables were for Romans. Wooden sheds, roofs, hay, orderly feeding troughs. Everything clean, everything orderly, everything like a damned garrison. Horses should sleep, eat, and shine. But Attila laughed at stables. "No stable for kings," he said. Because kings of the steppe didn't need four walls for their animals. Their horses slept under the sky, and the sky was harder than any roof.

The Huns tied their horses to poles, to wheels, to bare stakes. No straw, no padded bedding. Just earth, dust, sometimes snow. And the horses grew strong through it. They hardened, they ate whatever was available, they stood in the rain, they stood in the wind. No stable softened them. No stable took away the truth from them: Those who live live outside. Those who die also die outside.

Attila's horse was so much a part of him that it seemed like a king itself. But a king without a stable. The animal slept in the mud, stood in storms, froze in the winter—and still kept running when others had already dropped dead. That made it noble. Not gold, not jewelry, not silk reins. Only the dirt, the sweat, the blood it carried.

The Romans didn't understand this. For them, a horse was like a soldier in armor—shining, polished, tamed. But a horse on the steppe was a wolf on four hooves. It needed no armor, it needed no feeding troughs. It only needed freedom. And freedom stank, but it kept you alive.

Attila knew: A stable makes you soft. A stable takes away the sky, the stars, the cold. But cold shapes you. Rain shapes you. Hunger shapes you. That's why there was no stable for him. Not for him, not for his men, not for his horses. They all lived outside, they all lived raw.

Thus, the saying became law: No stable for kings. For a king who sleeps inside is already half-dead. A king who breathes outside is alive. And as long as the horses were outside, eating outside, running outside, they were kings – like Attila himself. Kings without stables, kings of the steppe, kings in the dirt.

## Dreams stink of decay

For the Huns, dreams weren't sweet stories. They were stinking holes in their heads. No heroes, no paradise, no angels with harps. Dreams stank of decay. They smelled of the dead left behind, of bones in the grass, of blood curdled in the sun.

Attila didn't dream of victories. He dreamed of screams that never stopped. Of faces he had slashed open that now stared back at him, with eyes as empty as the steppe. Sometimes he smelled the dream before he saw it—the smell of old flesh, sweet and rotten, as if a corpse had been left in the sun too long.

The Huns rarely talked about it. But every one of them knew it. The night brought no rest. It brought images of burned cities, of women screaming, of children disappearing in the smoke. No god came to comfort them. Only the stench. And it remained, even when they awoke. It hung in their noses, in their clothes, in their beards.

Attila once said, "Our dreams are more honest than the lies of the priests." And he was right. A dream forgives you nothing. It shows you what you've done and makes it uglier than it was. No wine, no song, no woman could wipe that away. The steppe itself crept into their heads, and it brought the stench with it.

Yet they lived with it. They laughed by day, they drank, they rode, they killed. But at night, when their eyes closed, the stench returned. Dreams that reeked of decay. And that was precisely what made them what they were: men who knew that even sleep was no escape.

At night, the camp lay silent. Only the horses snorted, the wind blew across the grass, a branch cracked somewhere. But in the heads of the Huns, it was loud. There were carcasses lying around, whole fields of them. Men without heads, horses with slashed bellies, children playing in puddles of blood. Nights filled with carcasses, not outside, but inside.

The Romans spoke of nightmares as if they were minor disturbances, shadows in their sleep. For the Huns, they were battlefields in their minds. Not shadows, but tangible corpses. They felt the weight, heard the cracking of bones, and smelled the sweet stench that always comes when meat has been left to linger for too long.

Some screamed in their sleep. Hardened riders who laughed by day, drinking and eating as if there were no tomorrow – and at night they tossed and turned

as if ghosts were squeezing their throats. Others awoke silently, sweat on their brows, hands on their sword hilts, believing the corpses were crawling out of the darkness.

Attila himself was not free from it. He pretended it didn't bother him, but he was just as cursed. His nights were full of faces that refused to die. Brothers, enemies, wives, children. All lay there, staring at him. And when he awoke, the stench continued—the dream clung to him like dirt that couldn't be washed off.

But no one spoke openly. They were Huns, not priests. They didn't vomit up their dreams; they wore them like scars. Everyone knew the other had the same filth in their heads. And perhaps that was precisely their bond. They were brothers in blood—and brothers in rotten dreams.

Nights filled with carcasses. No God came, no angel, no reconciliation. Only the stench, the images, the screams. And they woke up, rode on, and killed on. Because there was no way out. The mind was a battlefield that never stopped.

Sleep was no gift, no sweet consolation. Sleep tasted of corpses. Attila's men lay down, drunk, exhausted, bloody, hoping to find a few hours of rest. But as soon as their eyes closed, the taste crept into their mouths. Sweet, metallic, rotten. Like licking a rusty knife that's been stuck in a wound for too long.

They awoke with their mouths full of saliva, as if they'd been chewing on rotten meat. Some spat into the fire, others wiped their lips, but the taste remained. It came from within, not without. It was sleep itself, poisoned by the filth they'd experienced.

Attila was no exception. He, too, savored it. He once recounted how he dreamed he was eating a feast: golden plates, fat geese, and sweet wine. But as he chewed, he realized: They were dead fingers. Cold bones cracking between his teeth. He spat, he vomited, he woke up—and hours later, he could still taste the dream.

The Huns made jokes about it, because otherwise they would have gone crazy. "Have you been eating corpses again?" one would ask in the morning, and the other would grin with black gums. But behind the laughter lay truth. Each of them had the taste. Each of them slept in a kitchen full of carcasses, and no one could close the door.

The Romans had their priests who interpreted dreams, saw signs, and offered comfort. The Huns only had taste. For them, it was not a sign, not an oracle. It was simply the mouth of the steppe, reaching for them even in their sleep. A mouth that was never satisfied.

And so they slept on, night after night, in beds of earth, in dreams of flesh. Sleep tasted of corpses, and they devoured it because there was no alternative.

The steppe forgot nothing. You could burn down a village, kill everyone, let the women scream, silence the children—and ride on as if nothing had happened. But at night, the steppe returned. It sent you the faces. All of them. The ones you knew, the ones you had never seen, the ones you wanted to forget. They hung above you like a black sky, and they stared.

Attila knew that stare. Eyes that no longer had eyelids. Mouths that remained open, as if they wanted to say something else. Teeth that flashed like daggers. And they said nothing, nothing at all. They just looked. But that was enough. It cut deeper than any sword.

The Huns tried to drink it all away. They poured wine, mead, whatever they found down their throats until the world blurred. But the steppe was patient. It waited until the bottles were empty, until the last hangover came—and then it sent the faces back. Always the same, always new, endless.

Some men began to talk in their sleep. They begged, they apologized, they shouted names. Others lashed out as if pushing away a face that was forcing itself upon them. But no matter how hard they fought, the steppe won. Because the faces weren't imaginary. They were memories, and memories consume.

Attila drew strength from this. "If they come, it means you're still alive," he said. "If they stay away, you're dead." It was his way of turning the horror around. But he also knew: it was just talk. The faces were killing him, too. He woke up, stared into the darkness, and swore he had seen the eyes of a child he had tried to forget years ago.

The steppe sent faces back because it knew no rest. And the Huns had to take them. Night after night. No priest helped, no song, no woman. Only the steppe, grinning while its ghosts stared.

No Hun ever dreamed without carrion. Even if the night was quiet, even if the wine was sweet, even if a woman lay beside them—the stench came. Always.

Like a dog that never loses your scent. It crept under the blankets, crept into the lungs, crept into the heads. And in the dream, carrion lay around. Horses with open bellies. Men with half-rotten faces. Women with flies in their eyes. Children floating silently in pools of blood.

Sleep was not a refuge, but a second battlefield. By day they rode, fought, roared, and laughed. At night they lay in their own heads, and there the steppe was not grass, but flesh. Torn flesh that never disappeared. Every dream a field of corpses. No escape, no mercy.

Attila once said, "When you dream of carrion, you know you are Huns." It was his attempt to transform the stench into pride. And perhaps it worked. The men sometimes laughed in the morning, telling each other who had rotted in their dreams this time. But behind the laughter lay bitterness. For no one could dream like a child anymore.

The Romans told stories of peaceful dreams, of gods who came, of oases, of love. For the Huns, this was a fairy tale. No dream without carrion. No dream without the steppe, which smelled like a mass grave. Even the most beautiful pictures were rotten. A woman in a dream smiled – and maggots crawled out of her mouth. A horse ran – and its entrails dragged behind it.

But they accepted it. For anyone who lives on the steppe knows: everything ends in carrion. Grass grows, cattle eat, men die, and in the end, birds and dogs eat what's left. Why should dreams be any different?

So it became law: No dream without carrion. No night without the stench. No king, no warrior, no man escaped. And that was precisely what made them what they were—riders who knew, even in their sleep, that life tasted of decay.

## Enemies drink the same wine

Wine wasn't a question of friend or foe. Wine flowed down throats, regardless of whether one had bashed each other's skulls the day before. Enemies drank the same wine because thirst was stronger than hatred. And sometimes the drinking was more brutal than any battle.

Attila knew this. He hated the Romans, he plundered their cities, he let their fields burn—and yet he drank their wine. Barrels, jugs, amphorae. Sweet, heavy, like grapes ripened in the sun, not in the dust of the steppe. He drank

until his beard dripped, and he laughed as he did so. "The blood of my enemies tastes like grapes," he said, and his men roared.

It was a farce, an irony, a slap in the face to the Romans. They cultivated their vineyards with slave hands, they stored the wine in cool cellars, they thought it was part of their culture, their civilization. And then Attila came, the stinking Hun, the barbarian dog – and drank the wineries dry, while the owners lay in the dust.

But the truth was deeper. Wine made people equal. Whether emperor or beggar, whether Hun or Roman – intoxication shattered the differences. Men who fought each other by day lay next to each other by night, slurring, vomiting, laughing. They spat the same wine into the same filth. The hatred remained, yes, but it was softened by drinking, like meat in fire.

The Huns saw this soberly. "Wine knows no enemies," they said. "Wine only knows mouths." And they were right. The wine flowed like blood flowed. It sought out the nearest body, no matter who it belonged to.

Attila took this as proof that the world was a whore. Everything the Romans considered holy he could drink, eat, and defile. Wine was their pride—and he made it his mockery. Enemies drink the same wine because in the end, everyone vomits the same way.

A cup was more honest than any tongue. Attila knew this. Men could talk, lie, swear, pray—but as soon as the cup was full, they showed their true colors. The cup doesn't lie. It turns heroes into jokes and cowards into honest whiners.

The Romans gave their cups names, engravings, and decorated them with gods, angels, and victories. But that was just a facade. One cup of wine, and the emperor was as human as the lowest peasant. One cup of wine, and the soldier, who stood proudly at attention by day, wept into the lap of a whore by night.

The Huns loved that. They didn't need engravings. Their cup was made of wood, horn, anything that wouldn't break. They filled it, tipped it, and everyone was equal. Whether Roman, Hun, king, or servant—when drunk, everyone looked like a damn fool.

Attila played with it. He made ambassadors drink, made enemies drink, even made priests drink. And he watched them stumble, their words soften, their

hands tremble. He laughed because he knew: no sword could disarm as quickly as a full cup.

The cup doesn't lie. If someone pretended to be strong, the wine exposed them. If someone pretended to be godly, the wine exposed them. If someone pretended to be incorruptible, the wine exposed them. Attila saw it all. And he enjoyed it.

For in the end, the cup was fairer than any judge, harsher than any law. A man who drank could not hide. He was what he was—drooling, laughing, vomiting, crying. And Attila knew: This was the truth.

A jug of wine could bring more laughter than a victory. Attila's men knew this. They sat around the fire, their lips red, their hands sticky, their beards dripping. And they laughed. Laughed at the Romans, at the priests, at the dead, at themselves. Laughter over the jug, rough, ugly, full of mockery.

It wasn't courtly laughter, not subtle giggles behind fans. It was laughter that vomited, belched, and coughed. Men spat wine all over the floor, coughed, and continued laughing, as if the filth itself were the joke. One slapped the other on the shoulder so hard that the wine overflowed, and both roared as if they had mocked the world.

Attila himself laughed like a wolf. Deep, throaty, malicious. When he raised his jug, everyone knew things were about to get messy. He told stories, about battles, about women, about dead people. And he made them so raw that you didn't know whether to laugh or gag. But in the end, everyone laughed. Because the wine flowed, because the jug was full, because they were alive.

The Romans didn't understand this laughter. For them, wine was culture, pleasure, art. They sipped, they tasted, they discussed vintages. The Huns mocked it. "We don't drink the vintage," one said, "we drink death." And they laughed because it was true. Every jug was a victory, a stolen good, a trophy.

Laughter over the jug was more than fun. It was survival. When you've seen nothing but blood all day, you need to laugh at night, otherwise horror will consume you. So they laughed. At everything. At the emperor, at God, at themselves. Even at Death, who sat beside them, silent, lurking. Sometimes they poured him wine, too. And then they laughed even louder.

The intoxication was neutral. It didn't ask: Are you a Hun or a Roman? Friend or foe? Emperor or beggar? The intoxication tore off the masks and made

everyone equal. Attila knew this and took advantage of it. Because intoxication knew no sides.

A Roman who spoke proudly of his empire by day lay in the dirt by night, drooling, his pants open, while the Huns laughed. A Hun who had fought like a demon by day babbled next to a Roman merchant, and both sang the same song, off-key, loud, and ugly. Such was the intoxication: It removed borders like the wind removes dust.

The Romans wanted wine as a symbol of civilization. The Huns took that same wine and turned it into a symbol of chaos. No glass, no label, no measure. Jugs, skins, horns – the main thing was that it flowed. And when it flowed, everyone was equal.

Attila drank with envoys who cursed him the next morning. He drank with traitors he later hanged. He drank with brothers who distrusted him. But at night, in his intoxication, none of that mattered. They were all just bodies, staggering, laughing, vomiting.

That made intoxication dangerous. Because it could create peace where there shouldn't be any. An enemy became a drinking buddy. A brother became a traitor. Sometimes alliances were born in wine—and died in hangovers. But no one cared. Because intoxication reigned at the moment, and intoxication was stronger than any politics.

The Huns loved that. They said, "Wine knows no sides. It makes a fool of every man, and that's the only truth." Attila grinned. Because he knew: that was precisely what power was. If even enemies drank the same wine, then the world belonged to the thirsty, not the hesitant.

A jug could be full, could be half-full, could be swirled around until your hands trembled. But in the end, the same thing always remained: the dregs. Dark, thick, bitter. Like life itself.

Attila knew that the same truth lies in wine as in war: In the beginning, everyone is greedy, full of strength, full of thirst. They drink, they laugh, they shout. But when the jug is empty, only the dirt remains at the bottom. Bitter, heavy, almost impossible to swallow. And yet, someone drinks it. Because no one wants to waste anything. Because greed itself demands the last sip.

That's how it was with enemies. In the beginning, blood, fighting, hatred. But after all the drinking, after all the boozing, they were just men who had to

swallow the same dregs. Romans and Huns, emperors and barbarians alike. All had the same hangover, the same foul breath, the same bitter taste in their mouths.

The Huns didn't discriminate. They laughed at the dregs, gulped them down, made faces, and sometimes vomited right afterward. But they drank them. "That's the part that makes you a man," one said. "Sweet wine fills you up, the dregs show you who you are."

Attila grinned when he saw the last bit. For him, that was the most honest part. No lies, no glamour, no joy. Only bitterness. Just like the world. Just like power. In the end, there's always the dregs, and you have to swallow them, whether you want to or not.

Enemies drank the same wine—and ended up with the same dregs. No difference. No way out. Only proof that they were all the same when the intoxication wore off and only the bitter residue remained.

## Heaven spits on heroes

Heroes were a Roman joke. Men cast in statues, with laurel wreaths on their heads, with names muttered by priests as if they were incantations. But Attila knew: Heaven shits on heroes. Or rather, it spits on them. Rain, storms, hail—nature itself laughed at any man who called himself a "hero."

The Huns saw it every day. One man fought like a demon, split skulls, rode through blood, survived where ten others died—and then, two days later, the sky spat him out dead. Lightning strike. Fever. A fall from a horse because the ground was too soft. The sky didn't waste a thought on "heroes." To him, all were equal: dust, flesh, blood.

Attila understood this and made it his philosophy. "None of us is a hero," he said. "We are only men who have not yet fallen." He hated the Roman songs about glory. For him, glory was as fleeting as smoke, and the sky itself showed it: one storm, and everything was gone.

His men laughed at this. They knew their "heroism" would only last as long as the horse beneath them didn't stumble. They knew the sky could strike at any moment. And so they drank, they fucked, they fought like there was no

tomorrow. Because they knew: The sky spits on heroes, and tomorrow you might just be carrion in the grass.

The Romans told stories of heroes who ascended to heaven. The Huns told stories of heroes who perished in the dirt. The difference was honest. The heavens spit on heroes – and the steppe laughed along with them.

Rain was not a blessing. Rain was mockery. It fell on heroes as well as cowards, and it made no distinction. Attila rode through storms that made heaven and earth one. Water splashed on faces, drew blood from swords, washed dirt from wounds – but it never washed away the truth. Rain doesn't wash away legends.

The Romans liked to imagine rain romantically. "The gods weep for heroes," their poets would say when a general was dead. The Huns laughed at such nonsense. "If the sky weeps, it's only because it's drunk," one roared. For them, rain wasn't a divine sign. It was just another burden. A cold mockery that ripped open your skin when you were already carrying enough.

Attila remembered battles in which the rain made the heroes miserable. Men in shining armor, who looked like gods, suddenly lay there, wet, heavy, in the mud, unable to move. Their luster rotted in minutes. The steppe sucked them in, and the rain laughed. No legend could endure this.

The Huns were used to rain. They slept in the wet, rode in the wet, and had sex in the wet. For them, it was nothing unusual. But the Romans hated it when the rain drowned their songs of glory. No trumpeter could play when the water was in the horns. No military leader could speak proudly when his words were drowned by storm and thunder.

And the Huns grinned. For they knew: Rain devours lies faster than any sword. It washes away the facade, and only what is real remains—mud, fear, bare skin. Rain doesn't make heroes. It turns everyone into dogs crawling in the dirt.

Attila loved the play. Because it proved what he always knew: heroes are nothing. They're just stories that haven't gotten wet yet. The rain spits on them, and suddenly they're just like everyone else—drenched, tired, pathetic.

Lightning was the honest handwriting of heaven. No choirs of angels, no divine signs—just bright tongues shooting from the clouds to show that fame was a joke. Lightning doesn't strike fame, only flesh.

Attila had seen it himself: a rider, strong as an ox, proud as a lion, one of the best. He survived a hundred battles, stabbing enemies as if they were pigs.

Then a thunderstorm came. Lightning struck, knocking him and his horse down as if they were ants. No enemy, no sword, no plan—just a damned lightning bolt. That was the truth. Fame protects no one, steel protects no one, God protects no one. When the sky spits, you're done for.

The Romans pretended lightning was a message from Jupiter. Priests interpreted it, and emperors had the signs written down. But for the Huns, it was just a reminder: whether hero or coward, emperor or slave—if heaven feels like it, it will burn you in a second. No difference.

Attila grinned when he saw the Romans amidst lightning and thunder. Their ranks broke, not because of swords, but because of fear of the heavens. "Jupiter is punishing us," they whimpered. But Attila knew: This wasn't punishment. This was equality. Lightning was the great equalizer, turning everything into smoke that people took too seriously.

The Huns rode on, even in the storm. When lightning struck, they sometimes even laughed. "Heaven wanted to ride with us," they said. And they meant it. For they had no respect for fame, and the lightning proved them right.

A hero struck by lightning is no hero. He's just burnt flesh, stinking, steaming, like everyone else. Lightning doesn't strike glory, only bodies. And the sky laughed, while below, people continued to tell their tales.

The Romans loved their songs. They marched with trumpets, with drums, with choirs howling with glory, honor, and deities. But the storm consumed them all. When the clouds turned black and the wind screamed across the steppe, the songs were mere whispers. No heroic song survived against thunder.

Attila often heard it: legions coming with a proud sound, their voices like walls, their trumpets like weapons. But then the storm came. Wind tore the voices apart, rain beat the drums dead, thunder drowned every word. The storm laughed at the songs as if they were scarecrows in a hurricane.

The Huns had no songs designed to impress the heavens. They shouted, they roared, they laughed. And even that was barely audible when the storm raged. But that didn't bother them. For they knew: A true warrior doesn't need a hymn. He only needs a horse, a sword, and the courage to drown out the thunder—if necessary with a raw, untimely cry.

The Romans, on the other hand, were lost without their songs. Their discipline, their pride, their sacred order—everything collapsed when the heavens began

to roar. What was a hero if his song was torn apart by the storm? A wet man in iron, shivering with cold. Nothing more.

Attila grinned. For him, this was proof: heroic songs are lies that only work in sunshine. The storm consumed them, and silence remained. Silence that was more honest than any choir.

The Huns saw the storm not as an enemy, but as a brother. It laughed like them, it screamed like them, it spat like them. The storm was not a god, it was merely nature—raw, unruly, honest. And it devoured every damned legend that dared to sing against it.

The Romans believed that heroes ascended to heaven after death. Gods awaited them there with open arms, laurel wreaths, and eternal feasts. But Attila knew: that was bullshit. No heaven for heroes. Heaven was too busy spitting on them.

The steppe showed it every day. Men died, hard, bloody, brave – and the sky did nothing. No sun broke through the clouds, no angels sang. Only crows, only the smell of carrion, only the wind that brought the flies. The sky was cold, empty, indifferent. It cared nothing for heroes.

Attila made it a rule: "If you die, you stay here. Your flesh goes to the dogs, your bones to the grass, your name to the dust. No heaven awaits." His men nodded because they sensed it. They didn't need fairy tales. They had enough reality.

The Romans hated this truth. That's why they built heavens, temples, and myths. They needed an afterlife, otherwise they wouldn't have been able to bear their own lies. The Huns laughed at this. "If your sky were real," they mocked, "why does it rain on us just like it rains on you?" No answer. Only silence.

And the Huns rode on as if heaven didn't exist at all. For them, paradise was a cup of wine, a woman in a tent, a victory in the saddle. Everything else was smoke. No heaven for heroes, only earth for the dead. And that was more honest than any damned promise from a priest.

Attila himself believed in nothing but blood, iron, and the wind blowing across the steppe. "If there is a heaven," he said, "it's sitting here, on my horse, laughing at you idiots."

Kings wore crowns of gold, silver, and precious stones that sparkled in the sunlight. But to the Huns, these were mere toys. Attila knew: the only crown heaven had to bestow was spit. No blessing, no splendor—only the wet scorn that came from above.

Sometimes he sat on his horse, looked up at the gray sky, and suddenly the rain came. Drops that looked like spit. Ice-cold, hard, without respect. It was as if the sky were saying, "You think you're a king? Here, eat my slime." And Attila grinned. Because he knew: That was more honest than any damned laurel wreath.

The Romans wouldn't have been able to bear such a thing. For them, a crown was sacred. They believed it came from the gods, from bloodlines, from right. But Attila laughed. To him, a crown was nothing more than dirt you had to wear while you were on high. And heaven itself made it clear: He crowned not with gold, but with spit.

His men understood this. When they rode through the storm, with wet faces, they said, "Heaven crowns us again." They spat back, on the ground, on the Romans, on the legends. Spit as a crown—a sign that they lived not on fairy tales, but on dirt.

Attila loved this reversal. He didn't need a priest to bless him. He didn't need a pope to crown him. He only needed the rain hitting his face and the laughter of his men. That was his crowning glory. Real, wet, unvarnished.

For what is a crown worth that hasn't been sullied by heaven? Nothing. A lie. A piece of metal. But a crown made of spit—anyone who could bear the scorn could wear it. And that made it harder than any precious stone in Rome.

This is how Attila lived, this is how he ruled. With an invisible crown of spit, more honest than any piece of gold. The heavens spat on heroes – and Attila took it as his crowning glory.

## Bones in the grass

The steppe forgot nothing. You could burn down a village, gather the tents, set the fields on fire, let the women scream, slaughter the men—and years later you would return, and the steppe would have eaten everything down to the bones. Grass grew over it, wind swept over it, rain beat over it. But the bones remained. White, silent, brittle. Like teeth in an endless mouth.

Attila rode through such fields, and he grinned. "The steppe chews on the dead," he said. And he was right. It ground flesh to dust, it drank blood like wine, it tore through tendons and muscles. But the bones, it spat out again. Bones were like truth—they never completely disappeared.

The Huns took this seriously. For them, bones weren't remains. They were stories. A femur could tell how someone ran before falling. A skull could still bear the scream that died within it. The steppe spoke in bones, and the Huns listened.

The Romans had their tombs, their priests, their stone plaques with names. But what good did it do? The rain ate the writing, the earth swallowed the coffins, the worms ate the faces. In the end, all that remained for them, too, were bones. The difference was: they didn't want to see it. They wanted to pretend that eternity existed.

The Huns, on the other hand, lived in the midst of truth. Everywhere they rode, there was a cracking sound beneath their hooves. Skulls, ribs, vertebrae. This was their pavement, their road, their Bible. Bones in the grass that never disappeared. And when the wind blew, they whispered. Sometimes the men thought they heard voices calling them by name. But they rode on. For the steppe never stopped chewing.

For the Romans, the skull was sacred. They placed it in graves, decorated it with inscriptions, and considered it the sacred vessel of the soul. For the Huns, it was a ball. Children played with it, laughed, and tossed it around as if it were nothing. And perhaps that's exactly what it was: nothing. An empty bowl from which the steppe had already sucked the last bit of life away.

Attila saw it often: children in the camp, barefoot, dirty, with eyes that had seen more war than Roman generals in entire careers. They found skulls in the grass, round, hard, perfect for rolling. One kicked, another caught, the next laughed. No terror, no horror. Just play.

Some women screamed, wanting to ban it. "Let the spirits rest!" But Attila just grinned. "If the spirits have something against children, they should stand up." No one stood up. So the children continued playing. Skulls rolled through the dust, clattering as they hit stones. And the children screamed with joy.

The Romans called this barbarism. They saw it as proof that the Huns had no soul. But the truth was simpler: The Huns had seen too many dead people to be afraid of skulls. For them, they were commonplace, as normal as grass and wind. So why not play?

And in a way, it was honest. A skull had once laughed, once bitten, once breathed. Now it was once again a source of laughter. The laughter of children. A circle was closed, raw, brutal, but real.

Attila loved this symbolism. He said, "Our children learn early on that everything dies. But they also learn that death stops nothing. Not even play." That was his philosophy in bone form. No respect for false holiness. Only respect for the life that still remained.

Flesh could lie. Faces could feign, lips could pray, eyes could flicker as if they knew more than they truly did. But bones—they don't lie. They remain when everything else has rotted away. And they tell the truth, whether you want to hear it or not.

Attila understood this. He needed no scribes, no Roman chroniclers, no songs. He only needed the bones. A broken femur told him that someone was fleeing when they fell. A splintered skull told where the sword had struck. Knocked-out teeth told of fistfights before the knife came. Bones were more honest than any record.

The Huns read them like books. One picked up a piece of spine, turned it in his hand, spat into the dust, and said: "This one was crawling." They laughed, harshly, angrily, but not because they were amused—but because they knew: That's how it was. No fiction, no heroic posturing. Just naked, bony truth.

The Romans, on the other hand, hated this openness. They wanted monuments, legends, and clean histories. They buried their dead deep, placed coins over their eyes, and built them tombs as large as palaces. All to hide the truth: that in the end, only bones remain.

Attila turned it into a weapon. "The Romans build monuments," he said, "we leave bones in the grass. Let's see whose story lasts longer." And he was right.

The rain ate away the marble, the wind shattered the inscriptions. But the bones remained. White, silent, incorruptible.

Bones don't lie. They bear no glory, no shame, no excuses. They are what they are—hard, empty, real. And on the steppe, they told everything one needed to know.

The wind had a sense of humor. Not the kind of good humor, the kind that makes you laugh and feel better—no, the wind laughed like a drunk stumbling over a corpse. It whistled through the steppe, through old bones, through ribs lying in the grass like twisted harps. And when it played, it sounded like music from a grave.

Attila heard it on quiet nights. When the men slept, when only the horses snorted, the wind came. It crept through the open chests of chests, made them rattle, made them sing. A song without words, raw, cold, full of mockery. "The wind plays better than your singers," Attila once growled. And he was right.

The Huns knew this sound. Children grew up with it, women fell asleep with it, men woke to it. It was the soundtrack of the steppe: no choir, no orchestra, just wind shaking bones. Sometimes it sounded like laughter, sometimes like howling, sometimes like the groans of men who had long since rotted away.

The Romans called it ghost music. They told each other horror stories when they entered fields of bones, and their priests murmured prayers to drive away the voices. But the Huns just grinned. "The wind speaks truthfully," they said. "It doesn't tell stories. It only tells you that someone has fallen here."

And when he played, he remembered. Every note was a name no one spoke anymore. Every whistle was a cry that returned. The wind was the storyteller of the steppe, and his instruments were ribs, skulls, and vertebrae. No heroic hymn, no priestly blessing could compare.

Attila listened when the wind sang through his bones. For him, it was better than any Roman scroll. For the wind didn't lie, just as the bones didn't lie. Together they told the only story that mattered: Everything dies. And everything sounds hollow once the wind has passed through you.

The steppe wasn't an empty carpet. It was covered with skeletons, broken helmets, piles of bones exposed by the wind. Horses stumbled over them, again and again. Sometimes the cracking sound was so loud that riders thought

they'd broken their own leg—but no, it was just a skull beneath the hoof, crushed like an old pumpkin face.

Attila didn't care. "The steppe wants us to remember," he said. And by that, he meant: every ride was a ride through the past. No path without dead people, no gallop without bones. Horses learned to live with it. Some initially shied when the bones cracked, but after a while they simply kept running, as if skulls were mere stones.

The Huns knew the sound. They called it "the song of the hooves." A song of splinters, dull and hollow. No drumroll, no orchestra—just bones breaking when a horse struck them. Some said it was the applause of the dead, each time the Huns moved on.

The Romans were horrified by this. When they saw fields covered with bones, they stopped, prayed, and called for priests. For them, it was a curse, a bad omen. But the Huns laughed. "When a horse stumbles, it learns to walk," they said. "And when a man rides over bones, he learns that glory is only dust."

Attila himself once almost fell when his stallion slipped over a skull. He caught himself, saw the broken head in the grass, dismounted, stepped on it until nothing remained—and laughed. "That's how you stumble over the past," he said. And rode on as if nothing had happened.

The steppe was a graveyard without fences, and the horses were the gravediggers. They stamped, they crushed, they made room for new blood. Bones beneath hooves—that was the true music of the steppe.

At some point, not even bones remained. At some point, everything crumbled, ground by the wind, washed out by rain, trampled by horses. All that remained was white dust. Finer than flour, light as ash. Dust that glistened in the sun when the wind stirred it up. And this dust was all that remained of the ancient warriors.

Attila saw it often. A field where a battle had once raged, where blood flowed like rivers and screams tore the sky—years later, there was only dust. No helmet, no sword, no face. Only white powder hanging in the grass, sticking to hands, lying in the riders' beards.

The Huns knew: This wasn't ordinary dust. This was history. These were men who once lived, ate, fucked, and fought. Now they remained as a fine nothingness, to be blown up with a cough. "We breathe them in," one said.

"We carry the old ones in our lungs." And everyone nodded, because they knew: It wasn't a metaphor, it was reality. Every breath was filled with the remains of the dead.

The Romans built monuments to enforce immortality. The Huns breathed the dust and laughed. "Your heroes will turn to powder too," they mocked. "And we'll blow them away." No stone, no temple, no song could prevent that. In the end, they all turned to dust, and the wind made its own song out of it.

Attila loved this idea. "The wind is our priest," he said. "It carries away the ancients, and we ride in their wake." It wasn't sentimental, it was raw. For dust was honest. Dust made no distinction between king and servant, Roman and Hun, victor and vanquished.

Thus, the Huns rode through clouds of white dust left by ancient warriors. No prayer, no heaven, no monument—only breaths filled with death. But that bothered no one. For they knew: one day they, too, would return to dust. And the grass would continue to grow as if nothing had happened.

## Trafficking in women at dawn

The morning didn't smell of hope. It smelled of cold smoke, of horse manure, of cheap wine stale in bottles. And sometimes it smelled of women's skin, sold at dawn like a piece of meat. Trafficking in women at dawn—not a myth, not a legend, but everyday life.

Attila knew this, and he did nothing to sugarcoat it. He was no romantic, no priest, no liar. Women were commodities, just like horses, swords, or wine. And those who had commodities could trade. Simply, brutally, without much ado.

The men woke up after a night of booze and blood. Their heads pounded, their mouths stank, their hands still sticky from everything they'd touched. And then the business began. One man pulled a woman out of the tent by the arm, another clutched a few coins in his fist, a third offered a horse in exchange. There was no haggling or politeness. Only glances, grunts, curses.

Sometimes Roman women were sold, abducted from villages. Sometimes women from the steppe, banished or captured. They stood there, their hair

matted, their eyes red, their bodies tired. And they knew: their lives were a market, whether they wanted it or not.

Attila rarely intervened himself. For him, it wasn't the king's business, but the men's. But he observed, and he knew: precisely such markets kept the Horde going. No gold, no priests, no sermons – but meat, wine, weapons, and women. Everything that showed the men that they were alive.

At dawn, trade was at its dirtiest. While still drunk, still sweating, still stinking, deals were made that no one would later admit to. But everyone knew: It was as normal as the first light over the steppe.

Coins clinked like a mockery. Small, round things, embossed with the faces of Roman emperors whose names no one wanted to speak anymore. But at dawn, they were the language everyone understood. Coins for skin—that was the trade, without masks, without pretense.

A man pulled a woman out of the tent. She stumbled, barefoot, her hair matted, her dress half-torn. He grabbed her like a goat on a rope, holding her up as if she were prey. "What are you offering?" he asked. No name, no title, just merchandise.

Another reached into his purse, clinking the coins. Copper, silver, sometimes gold. He threw them into the dirt, not counting them, not checking them. He knew the deal wasn't clean. But he also knew: at dawn, no one checks the value. Everyone just wanted the deal over quickly, before the sun revealed the shame.

The women stood still. Some wept, quietly, almost inaudibly. Others just stared, like empty vessels from which all life had already been poured out. They knew: It wasn't about them. It was only about skin, warm, soft, usable. Their stories, their memories, their names—everything was dust.

The Romans would have turned something like this into a courtroom, a drama full of morality and guilt. The Huns turned it into a business, dry, dirty, and direct. Coins exchanged hands, women changed tents. So simple, so cruel, so commonplace.

Attila saw it, and he knew: This is how power worked. Not in palaces, not in temples, but in the filth, where coins were exchanged for skin. There lay the truth, raw, stinking, unvarnished.

And the coins laughed. They clinked as they slid into new bags, they shimmered briefly in the dawn, as if to say, "Today you are skin, tomorrow you are dust."

Coins didn't always clink. Sometimes things were even more primitive, even more honest, even dirtier. Bargains of meat. A horse for a woman. A sack of wine for two nights. A sword for a daughter. Everything was negotiated at dawn, when the intoxication of the night was still fresh in people's minds and morals had already been killed.

Attila saw men laughing as they traded horses, as if women were just part of the deal. "That animal runs faster, but she lasts longer," one said, and the others roared. Not a shred of shame. Because shame was a luxury, and luxury was for Romans, not Huns.

The women stood there, silent, empty, like cattle in a market. Some tried to assert themselves, glaring defiantly and pursed their lips. Others endured everything, knowing that one look too many, one word too loud—and the deal would end in blood instead of exchange.

There were also tougher deals. One man who was in debt offered his own wife to save his life. Another promised his sister in exchange for a horse that would get him out of the camp. Flesh for flesh, blood for blood.

The Huns didn't see this as a disgrace. For them, it was nature. Everything had its price. Those who were weak were sold. Those who were strong bought. Simple, brutal, without preaching. The Romans would have called it "injustice." The Huns called it "morning."

Attila knew: Right here, in these sordid exchanges, lay the naked truth about power. Not in gold, not in gods, not in lies—but in flesh, which was exchanged as if it were a saddle or a skin.

And while the deals were being made, dogs barked, roosters crowed, and the day grew. The trade ended, the sun rose, and everything looked like a normal camp again. But in the dirt lay the traces—barters of meat that no one spoke aloud, but everyone knew about.

The morning had a language of its own. Not loud, not clear—but rough, brittle, overcast. Voices in the morning haze, half still drunk, half already awake. Men whispered, laughed, cursed, while making deals they would deny by midday.

Attila heard these voices as he walked through the camp at dawn. No trumpet call, no command—just grunts, growls, shallow laughter. Like animals bending

over carrion. A word here, a price there, a name quickly swallowed. Women were counted like sheep, traded like furs.

The voices sounded different than during the day. No pride, no posturing. No "I am the greatest," no "I have achieved glory." Just naked greed, naked hunger, naked desperation. Men spoke with throats that still stank of wine and hands that still smelled of blood.

Sometimes you could hear the women too. No screaming—that had been during the night. In the morning, the voices were quieter. A whimper, a plea, a barely audible "no." But the hazy light swallowed these sounds. They were drowned out by the clinking of coins, the snorting of horses, the croaking of men.

The Romans would have called notaries, written contracts, and pressed seals. The Huns had only voices in the morning mist. Flat, raw, without paper. Words that vanished as quickly as the fog over the tents. But the deals remained genuine, even if no one wrote them down.

Attila grinned when he heard that. "Here speaks the truth," he murmured. For these voices had no lies, no mask, no stage. They were as filthy as the world really was. And anyone with ears heard more truth in them than in a thousand Roman laws.

When the sun touched the steppe, everything changed. The darkness could hide much—the stench, the business, the tears. But the first light revealed everything. Faces in the first light: wrinkled, hungover, dirty, honest.

The men looked like cattle chased from the barn. Red eyes, chapped lips, fingers still sticky. Some grinned, coins in their hands, content like children with new toys. Others looked empty, as if they had lost more than they had gained. The light showed no mercy. It revealed every wrinkle, every crack, every shame that had been repressed during the night.

The women, on the other hand, seemed even harder in the morning light. Shadows had hidden them, the fire had made their faces flicker. But the sun revealed everything. Bruises, torn skin, eyes so tired they seemed almost transparent. Some looked directly into the light, as if challenging it. Others lowered their gaze, knowing it would do no good.

Attila liked this first light. He said, "The night is full of lies. The morning devours them." And he was right. For what looked like power in the darkness often

looked like dirt in the morning light. A man who had acted mightily at night looked like an animal wallowing in the mud in the morning.

The Romans would have used veils, robes, and ceremonies to hide their filth. The Huns had only the light. And it was merciless. It exposed the truth, raw and unvarnished. Everyone could see it, no one could deny it.

The faces in the first light were not heroes, not queens, not legends. They were simply people, broken, dirty, real. And that was precisely what made the steppe more honest than any Roman dish.

The morning was no friend. It came like a bastard, cold and bright, and exposed everything the night had tried to hide. Blood on the hands, sweat on the skin, tears in the eyes—nothing escaped. The morning forgets nothing.

Attila knew this, and he loved it. "The night is a liar," he said, "the morning is the executioner." And that's exactly how it was. Men who felt like kings at night staggered through the dust in the morning, sweating, vomiting, holding their heads in their hands. Women who had been sold sat like lifeless shadows in the first light, and everyone could see what had happened. No fairy tale, no excuse. Just stark reality.

The Huns made no secret of it. They laughed at the morning, just as they laughed at everything. "It only shows us what we already know," they said. But deep down, they knew: The morning burned itself into their memory. Every deal, every face, every cry that had been missed in the haze—it would return when the sun filled the steppe.

The Romans would have tried to cover up the morning. They would have called priests to bless, put on robes to hide the dirt. But here, on the steppe, there was nowhere to hide. The sky was too vast, the earth too flat, the light too honest.

Attila took advantage of this. "He who endures the morning is stronger than any hero," he said. For heroes were merely figures of the night, beautiful, shining, and false. In the morning, they remained as men who stank, trembled, and were lost. The morning forgets nothing, and therefore it was mightier than any sword.

Thus, every trafficking of women ended at dawn: not with glory, not with pride, not with oblivion—but with the merciless clarity of light. And that made the steppe more cruel, but also more honest, than any civilization.

## Coins sticking with blood

Coins always had the same smell: metal, sweat, dirt. But on the steppe, they smelled different. Sharper. Worse. Coins stained with blood. They hadn't come clean from the treasury, hadn't been counted by bookkeepers, hadn't been consecrated by priests. They had been cut from corpses, pulled from the pockets of the dead, torn from fingers that still twitched.

Attila knew: every coin was a story. Not of trade, but of violence. A coin only shone when it was washed in blood. A sack full of coins was nothing more than a sack full of corpses in metal form.

The Huns laughed at this. They said, "We don't collect stones, we collect screams." For every coin they held was bought with a scream—of a man who died, a woman who was sold, a child who fell silent. The metal carried it within itself, even if the Romans pretended it was pure gold.

The Romans engraved imperial heads on them, as if they could cover up the dirt. But Attila saw through the trick. "Your emperor only shines because he lies on blood," he mocked. And he was right. No denarius, no aureus, no sestertius had ever passed through the world without blood.

The Huns needed no banks, no treasuries. They put the coins in bags, wore them on their belts, and threw them in the dust. And when they picked them up, the old red was often still stuck to them. "That's the true value," they said. Not the emperor's head, not the number—but the blood that clung to them.

Attila grinned when he held coins in his hand. He turned them over, felt the cold, smelled the iron. And he knew: This isn't money. This is condensed death. Coins sticky with blood—wealth couldn't be more honest.

Coins were never clean. Whoever held them in their hand always had guilt in their fist. Guilt that smelled of iron, of sweat, of life that no longer breathed. Hands full of guilt, that was the price if you wanted to be rich.

Attila saw it in every camp. Men came with heavy clinking bags and empty faces. They had robbed, plundered, and killed. Their hands were sore, torn, and red. Yet they still reached for the coins, as if they might find something other than blood in them. But all they found was guilt.

The Romans called coins "mediums of exchange." They pretended they could buy peace. But Attila laughed at this. "You're not buying peace," he mocked, "you're only buying the killing to take place somewhere else." Every coin that

slid across the table shifted guilt from one hand to the next. No peace, just a baton of blood.

The Huns were more honest. They didn't hide guilt. They knew: If you hold a coin in your hand, then you've bought blood. Maybe not today, maybe not for you—but somewhere, someone died for it. They laughed when they counted coins because they knew: Guilt stacks up like metal.

Attila himself carried coins, but he never pretended they were pure. "This is the weight of sins," he would say as he shook a bag. And he meant it. He felt the guilt sticking to his hands, eating into his skin. But it didn't bother him. For him, it was honest. Guilt was part of the business. If you didn't want guilt, you shouldn't live a life.

The Romans washed their hands, the Huns left them dirty. In the end, both were the same. For guilt never washed away. It remained, sticky, cold, in every damned coin. Hands full of guilt, that was the only wealth the steppe recognized.

Gold glittered, but it always glittered in the wrong place. Not in the palace, not in the temple, not in the treasuries—but in the dirt. Where blood had flowed, where men had crawled, where horses had stood defecating. Gold in the dirt, that's where it was most often found.

Attila rode through fields littered with corpses and knew: There's more gold here than in Rome. Not because the dead were rich, but because every fight ripped open their pockets. Rings fell, chains broke, coins rolled into the mud. The soil ate them, the rain washed them away, the dust covered them. Gold in the dirt, as if the earth itself were laughing: "I don't care about your wealth."

The Huns knew this. After every battle, they went not only for wine and women, but also for coins. They rummaged through the mud, pulled pouches from tattered belts, and found gold pieces between ribs. Their hands became dirtier the shinier the loot. "That's fitting," they laughed. "Gold belongs in the dirt, just like us."

The Romans told stories of gold as a symbol of civilization. But Attila spat on this idea. To him, gold was nothing more than blood reflecting the sun. "Your shine is only a reflection of death," he said. And he was right. For not a single piece of gold reached human hands without dirt and blood.

The Huns sometimes carelessly threw gold into the dust, drank wine over it, and urinated on it. They knew it was just metal, heavy and cold. True wealth was laughter, intoxication, and the blood on their hands. But they still picked up the gold again and again. Because the dirt didn't need it, and the Huns did.

Gold in the dirt—that was the truest truth. No temple, no emperor, no hero could free it from it. Those who wanted wealth had to bend down, had to dig their hands into the mud, had to push bones aside. Attila knew: that was the only way to become rich. Not with prayers, not with honor, but with dirt.

There was money—and there was blood money. The difference was as great as between water and wine. Money was earned through trade, through labor, through those Roman fairy tales of contracts and laws. Blood money was earned when someone died. When someone lost their sword, their heart, their life—and you picked up their coins. Blood money that clinked louder than any other.

Attila heard this sound. He could distinguish. Ordinary coins sounded dull, almost bored. Blood money, on the other hand, had a brighter tone, as if the blood were still fresh on it. A bag full of blood money was like a chorus of the dead laughing when it was shaken.

The Huns collected blood money with pride. They knew: every aureus, every denarius, every damned copper penny was a piece of stolen life. They threw it into piles, counted it with bloody fingers, and drank wine over it. "Blood money counts louder," they said, and they meant it. Not because it was worth more—but because it was more honest.

The Romans hated this idea. For them, money was clean, blessed by priests, guaranteed by emperors. But they were lying. Every Roman soldier received his pay only because someone somewhere had died for it. They didn't want to hear it, they didn't want to see it. But Attila forced them. "Your money is also blood money," he mocked. "You're just too cowardly to admit it."

Blood money had another power. It made men greedy, faster, more brutal. Those who tasted blood money wanted more. It was like an intoxication, like a wine that never ran dry. Men died for it, men killed for it, men betrayed their brothers for it. Blood money spoke louder than friendship, louder than loyalty, louder than God.

Attila grinned when he counted it. For him, blood money wasn't just wealth, it was music. It reminded him that every victory, every battle, every burning

village had a price. And that price was made of metal, heavy, cold, and bloody. Blood money—and nothing in the world made more noise.

A coin purse was never just a purse. It was a grave, a confessional, a piece of evidence. Every clinking sack was full of sins that could be counted. Purses full of sin—that was the true treasure of the steppe.

Attila knew that sound. He heard it when a man came into camp, his shoulders hunched, his belt heavy. The bag beat against his thigh like a heart that belonged not to the man, but to the dead who had died for it. Every beat, every clang, was a confession: "Here lie sins."

The Huns weren't ashamed. They carried the purses open, dangling them so everyone could hear how heavy they were. It was a music of guilt and pride. "My sins are greater than yours," they boasted, and laughed. The thickest purse signified not only wealth, but also a trail of blood. Whoever had many coins had taken many lives.

The Romans, on the other hand, hid their purses. They tied them under garments, placed them in treasure chambers, and buried them in walls. They pretended that sin could be kept in the shadows. But that was a lie. The purse still spoke, silently perhaps, but tangibly. A Roman senator with gold was just as guilty as a Hun with silver, only more cowardly.

Attila sometimes tore open a purse himself, let the coins fall into the dust, and trampled them with his boot. "This is your god," he said, "a god of sin, who lives in the filth." And the men nodded, because they knew: No prayer could cleanse the purse. No sermon, no priest, no emperor.

Bags full of sin—that was the true treasure the world carried. No gold glittered without dirt, no silver clinked without blood. Those who were richer weren't cleaner, but merely deeper in debt. And the Huns were honest enough to say it out loud.

Wealth never had anything to do with work. Not on the steppe, not in Rome, not anywhere in the damned world. Wealth came from corpses. Always. Coins that glittered had always first been soaked in blood. No piece of gold that didn't pass through dead hands, no piece of silver that didn't glitter in ashes. Wealth from corpses—that was the only honest truth no one wanted to speak out loud.

Attila spoke it out anyway. "For every aureus you hold, there's one lying in the dust," he told his men. "Never forget that." And they didn't forget. They knew: If their purse grew heavier, it was because somewhere bones had become lighter.

The Huns didn't make a fuss about it. They laughed, they boasted, they admitted that their coins came from corpses. "We don't dig," they said, "we plunder." No secret, no shame. They threw gold pieces into the dirt, let children play with them, because they knew: The metal has no value except for the blood it cost.

The Romans, on the other hand, spun lies around their wealth. They talked about trade, about justice, about divine order. But Attila grinned. "Your wealth stinks just as much as ours," he sneered. "You just have nicer stories to tell." And he was right. Every temple, every amphitheater, every damned statue stood on the bones of slaves.

The steppe was more honest. There, the corpses lay still visible in the grass. Coins gleamed beside them, as if to say, "Here's the price." Those who were rich only had to look in the mirror – and they saw the faces of those who had fallen for it.

Attila knew that was his legacy. No heroism, no glory, no eternal empire. Just sacks full of coins stained with blood and the knowledge that all wealth was born from corpses. And that's precisely why he laughed. Because at least he was honest enough to admit it to himself.

## No friend, only prey

Friendship was a Roman joke. Songs, oaths, vows—all just smoke, vanishing at the first gust of wind. There was no such thing as "friend" on the steppe. There were only riders beside you, as long as they were of use to you. And when they were of no use to you, they became prey. So simple, so brutal. Not a friend, just prey.

Attila knew this. He had seen brothers draw knives because one horse was faster than the other. Men fighting side by side, saving each other's lives, and then slitting each other's throats the same evening over a sack of wine. Trust was like a dead dog: it stank as soon as you left it lying there.

The Huns didn't tell stories of eternal alliances. They laughed at them. "A friend is just an enemy who hasn't yet acquired enough value," they said. And they lived by that. Everyone knew they were being watched, everyone knew that a smile could only be a cover. It kept the horde sharp, alert, hungry.

The Romans relied on treaties, laws, and words. The Huns relied on greed, mistrust, and fear. And those who survived longer proved what worked better. Attila grinned when Roman envoys unrolled their parchments. "You write friendship," he mocked, "but you mean gold. We'll skip the writing and just take the gold."

Friendship was dust. Loot was real. Horses, women, coins, blood—you could touch it, count it, drink it. A friend, on the other hand, was just an idea, and ideas on the steppe had the same value as dirt under your boot.

Attila lived like this, and his men lived like this. No friends, only prey. Anyone who didn't understand this died quickly. And his bones remained in the grass, a silent monument to the fact that trust was worthless in this world.

Blood was no guarantee. Being brothers didn't mean you were safe on the steppe. It just meant the dagger was closer. Brothers in betrayal—that was the true story of every Horde.

Attila had brothers. He knew how close love and hate were. One would help you in battle, shout your name, pull you from the mud. That same evening, he stared at your purse, your horse, your wife—and his gaze turned cold. Brothers were not friends. Brothers were competitors who still had patience.

The Huns knew this. They made no distinction between strangers and brothers when it came to loot. "Blood won't satisfy you," they said. "Only flesh and gold will." And when things got tight, a brother was just as much prey as an enemy.

The Romans talked of brotherhood, of sacred bonds. But Attila spit on that. He had seen brothers slashing each other's bellies with knives while the fires of battle still smoldered outside. They carried on as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Sometimes a sideways glance, a sideways word, was enough. Sometimes a horse that ran faster. Sometimes just a hint of jealousy. And suddenly the brother was an enemy. The steppe forgave nothing. Love was dust. Greed was eternal.

Attila lived with it. He trusted no brother, no blood oath, no kiss. For him, every man was a potential traitor, even if they shared the same father. And that was precisely what kept him alive. Those who believed in brotherhood died. Those who expected betrayal survived.

Brothers in betrayal – that wasn't the exception, that was the rule. And the bones in the grass told the story better than any song.

There was no place where a knife spoke as honestly as in the back. From the front, you could shout, boast, and pose. From behind, there was only the truth. A knife in the back – that was the steppe, naked, unvarnished.

Attila saw it countless times. Men laughing together around the fire, drinking wine, swearing to be brothers—and in the next breath, one of them lay in the dust, a dagger between his ribs. No warning, no announcement, just cold iron. That's how friendships ended. Not with words, but with blood in the grass.

The Huns didn't see this as a scandal. For them, it was part of the game. "If you turn your back, it's your own fault," they said. Vigilance was life, trust was death. Everyone knew that the knife wasn't just for enemies. Everyone carried it, even for the person sitting closest.

The Romans talked about honor, about battle lines, about fair fights. Attila laughed at this. "A fair fight is only for idiots who want to die," he mocked. For him, a knife in the back wasn't a betrayal, but a strategy. Faster, safer, more effective. Why hit a man in the face when he's just offering his back?

The steppe was full of men with scars who told the story of their survival. And full of bones that told the story of how others hadn't. Every dagger that was drawn wrote a story. Not a song, not a fairy tale—just a short, damp sound as metal cut through flesh.

Attila himself didn't trust anyone with his back. Not brothers, not friends, not women. He slept lightly, with his hand on his sword, and he knew: whoever underestimates the knife in his back is already half dead.

Knife in the Back – that was the true anthem of the Horde. Everyone knew it, no one said it out loud. But everyone lived by it.

The steppe was too vast, too empty, too cold for friendship. There was no room for tender bonds, for promises that lasted longer than a cup of wine. The steppe knew no friendship, only hunger, thirst, greed—and the men who survived.

Attila rode through this emptiness and knew: anyone riding beside you was not your friend. He was just another body, perhaps keeping you alive for one night because he was falling faster than you. That was all. Tomorrow he could be your enemy, or your prey, or just a pile of bones in the grass.

The Romans told stories of friendship. Heroic couples who swore eternal loyalty to each other. Attila spat on such fairy tales. "Your friendship will die at the first sign of hunger," he said. "Give each other half a loaf of bread and a knife, and we'll see how long you remain friends."

The Huns made no attempt to sugarcoat it. They called things as they were. "A man is a man, not a friend." They trusted no one, they expected betrayal, they lived with the knowledge that anyone besides them could also be their next enemy. That wasn't weakness. That was survival.

The steppe itself preached it. The wind cried it in the nights, the grass whispered it, the bones in the ground confirmed it. No friend, only prey. Those who forgot this died. Those who understood it lived longer—perhaps.

Attila absorbed this like wine. For him, every oath was a lie, every smile a mask, every pat on the back a threat. He didn't build friendships; he built fear. And that was precisely what held the Horde together. Not love, not loyalty—only fear and greed.

The steppe knew no friendship. And that was its only truth.

On the steppe, even a glance wasn't a gesture, a sign, or friendship. Every glance was a bargain. A quick exchange: I'll show you something, you give me something. A promise of violence or an offer not to kill you today.

Attila understood the game. His eyes were cold, hard, like blades that shouldn't be touched. He knew: whoever looked into your eyes for too long wanted something. Respect, fear, gold, blood—something. No gaze was ever free.

The Huns played this game better than the Romans. They needed no treaties, no long words. A glance was enough. If someone bowed their head, it was clear: they would pay. If someone held their gaze, it was clear: there would be blood. Every glance was a deal, faster than any parchment, clearer than any Roman lie.

The Romans didn't see this. They thought glances were gestures of trust or honor. Attila laughed at this. "You stare at each other like lovers," he mocked. "We stare at each other like merchants—only our trade is paid for with knives."

The Huns knew: A glance could buy more than coins. It could buy fear, respect, submission. Sometimes it could even buy murder, if the right man caught it. Every glance carried weight, and every man knew he himself was a prize.

Attila loved that. He needed no words, no speeches. One look was enough, and the horde understood. That was his power: no friend, only prey—and every look a deal that confirmed that.

There were men who clung to the idea that somewhere a friend was waiting. That amidst all the blood, all the dirt, all the mistrust, there was someone sincere. But that was the last illusion—and it died just as quickly as every other dream on the steppe.

Attila saw it often. A young warrior, not yet calloused, believed that the rider beside him was his brother in heart. They fought together, they drank together, they swore never to betray each other. And then night came. One reached for the other's purse. One wanted the horse, the woman, the wine. And the illusion died in the dust, with a dagger thrust.

The Huns didn't laugh at such illusions; they spit on them. "Friendship is for children," they said. "Adults count loot." For them, it wasn't a betrayal if someone shattered the illusion—it was simply nature. Just as the wind blows, just as blood flows.

The Romans clung to fairy tales of eternal friends, of heroes who died side by side. Attila grinned at this. "They didn't die as friends," he said, "they died as idiots who couldn't let go of their last illusion."

The last illusion was dangerous. It made men weak, it blinded them. They let knives near them because they believed the hand holding them would never hurt them. And that's precisely why they died.

Attila killed this illusion in every man who followed him. He didn't preach friendship, he preached fear. Not love, but prey. "No friend, only prey" – that was the law that shattered every illusion. And only those who understood this survived long enough to make prey themselves.

In the end, nothing remained. No friendship, no bonds, no loyalty. Only men who looked at each other and knew: I'll take what you have, or you'll take what I have. That was the ultimate truth that burned away every illusion.

## The Pope prays into the void

Rome loved its masks. The emperor sat enthroned on gold, the senators sweated in togas, and the pope—that great shepherd of God—stood in robes heavier than the flesh on his bones. He prayed, he preached, he raised his hands to heaven as if someone up above were listening. But the steppe knew better: the pope prays into the void.

Attila grinned when he thought about it. Men with swords made history, men with beards and cups kept it going. But a man in a robe talking to the sky? Ridiculous. The sky spat on heroes—and it spat even more on priests.

The Huns saw no difference between a pope and a merchant. Both had something to sell. One offered wine or weapons, the other stories of a god no one had ever seen. "That's the cheapest trick," they said, "the invisible merchandise." You can't examine it, you can't touch it, but you must pay for it—with obedience, with gold, with your life.

The Pope spoke of sin, of eternal life, of paradise. But Attila knew: his paradise was a tent full of wine, meat, and women. No heaven, no God. Only the present, so loud and bloody that no prayer could overcome it.

The Romans believed in this robed man. They fell to their knees, they kissed his rings, they heard his words as if they were thunder. But the Huns heard nothing but wind. A man prayed – and the heavens didn't answer. The heavens were empty, cold, silent.

Attila laughed. "If your God were real, he would have stopped us long ago," he said. But no one stopped him. No flood, no lightning, no miracle. Only a pope shouting into the void.

Rome shone. Golden altars, flickering candles, incense so thick it almost smothered the truth. Men knelt, women wept, priests sang—and in the midst of it all stood the Pope. The great man who was supposed to roar in God's ear. But no matter how loudly he prayed, heaven remained deaf.

Attila would have vomited if he'd seen that. Men placing their last coins on altars while children starved outside. Women crawling barefoot through the dust to kiss a piece of cloth supposedly sacred. Golden altars, deaf ears—that was all that remained.

The Huns didn't build altars. They had fireplaces, barrels of wine, and women in tents. This was their church. And it worked better than any temple in Rome. For

their god responded immediately: Wine made you drunk, meat made you full, women made you tired. No waiting, no silence, no heaven that gave nothing in return.

The Romans believed in symbols. Golden chalices, shining crosses, carved figures. Attila laughed at the theater. "You feed wood and metal with your tears," he mocked. "And think it speaks back." But it didn't speak. It remained silent, just as the heavens were silent.

The papal church was just a market with more beautiful trinkets. Instead of women and horses, they sold salvation. Instead of coins for meat, they traded coins for fairy tales. And people bought it because they were afraid. Afraid of the void, afraid of death, afraid that no one was really listening.

But the Huns knew the void. They rode into it every day. No god, no prayer, no echo. Only wind, only dust, only their own breath. They had learned that it was better to laugh in the void than to kneel in the void.

The Pope stood on golden altars and spoke into silence. And the silence was louder than any prayer.

The steppe was no place for prayer. It was too vast, too empty, too merciless. Those who cried out in the steppe heard only an echo from the wind. No god, no saint, no angel – only dust, only cold, only the gnashing of teeth when the night grew too long. The silence of the steppe was more sincere than any Roman amen.

Attila often rode alone, far out, where campfires were no longer visible. There, where the stars burned, so cold they laughed at you. He knew: No one can hear you here. No emperor, no priest, no god. If you fall, you are dust. If you scream, the wind eats your voice. That was the truth, raw, unvarnished.

The Romans hated this silence. They couldn't bear it. They had to cover it up—with bells, with chants, with prayers that they threw into the sky like coins into a well. But the well of the steppe was bottomless. Everything fell into it, nothing came back.

The Huns lived with this silence. They laughed into it, they spat into it, they drank, they fucked, they killed—and the silence remained. It didn't judge, it didn't reward. It was simply there, stronger than any sermon, harsher than any punishment.

Attila once said, "He who can endure the silence of the steppe is stronger than any god." And the men nodded, because they knew: Out here, there are no answers, no promises. Only your own heart, beating until it stops.

The silence of the steppe was brutal. But it was honest. It promised nothing, it held nothing back. It was the opposite of Rome. And that was precisely why it was more powerful. For the Pope prayed – and the steppe remained silent. And silence was always right.

Rome was nothing more than a giant bazaar. They didn't sell horses, women, or wine—they sold God. The Pope was not a saint; he was a merchant. And his product was the most invisible of all. Trade with God was the greatest business in the world.

Attila laughed at this stunt. He knew markets. He had seen men trade women for horses, coins fall into the dirt, debt clink in purses. But the Pope's business was even dirtier. He sold hope. A thing no one had ever seen, smelled, or touched. And yet people paid. They paid with gold, with blood, with their lives.

The Huns called it madness. "We trade in meat, they trade in air," they said. And they were right. In the tents, you got what you bought: a woman to warm you, a horse to carry you, a knife to cut. From the Pope, you got only words. And words vanished in the wind, just like prayers.

The Romans believed in it because they were afraid. Afraid of emptiness, afraid of death, afraid of nothingness. They bought into stories because they couldn't bear the silence. The Pope knew this and fed them like a butcher feeds pigs—to the slaughter.

Attila spat on this deal. "If your God were real, he wouldn't need merchants," he said. "He would sell himself." But God remained silent, and the Pope collected. Golden chalices, silver chains, palaces crammed with loot that would have been more honestly stolen had it fallen in war.

The Huns were more honest. They took what they wanted, without blessings, without fairy tales. No bargaining with God, no bargaining with illusions. Only wine, meat, and blood. Anyone who didn't want that was weak. Anyone who was weak died. So simple, so clear.

But the Pope stood there, raised his hands, blessed the people—and sold air. Trading with God was the dirtiest business. And everyone who paid for it was praying into the void.

Rome wasn't strong because of its walls, not because of its legions, not because of its gold treasures. Rome was strong because of its fear. Millions of Romans crawled into churches every day, confessed, prayed, and wept. They gave everything—coins, time, bodies—just to buy a small piece of comfort. The Romans' fear was the fuel that made the Pope powerful.

Attila saw this and grinned. "You're not praying to God," he said, "you're praying to your fear." And he was right. The Romans were afraid of the steppe, afraid of the Huns, afraid of hunger, plague, death. But most of all, they were afraid of the emptiness that followed. They needed someone to promise them that life would continue, that death wasn't the end.

The Pope gave them just that. He was the merchant of fear. He stood in gold and purple and said, "Obey, and you will be saved." And they obeyed. Not out of faith, but out of fear. They paid coins, built churches, kissed rings—all to avoid falling into nothingness.

The Huns laughed at this fear. "Death is death," they said. "After that, there's nothing." They drank as if there were no tomorrow, they fought as if they were already half dead, they loved as if they were about to die. For them, death was not a mystery, but a wall. Hard, cold, final. No fear, only acceptance.

The Romans, on the other hand, screamed when they died. They looked for priests, wanted last words, last prayers, last hopes. Attila saw them and thought: "Your god is just a band-aid that doesn't hold."

The Romans' fear made them weak. They prayed into the void because they couldn't bear the silence. The Pope lived off of it, fat, full, in golden halls. And Attila rode through the land and knew: fear is the true gold of Rome. Without it, the Pope would be just an old man in a suit.

A prayer was nothing more than air passing through a filthy mouth. Words that crumbled into the dust before they even rose. A prayer in the dust—that's how the steppe saw it, and that's how Attila heard it.

The Romans knelt in their churches, reciting sacred sentences they themselves barely understood. They thought their words rose up, directly into the ears of God. But in reality, they fell into the dust, blown away by the next gust of wind, vanishing like smoke from a bonfire.

Attila rode through villages where priests prayed with raised hands while the Huns plundered. He saw them scream, saw them weep, saw them turn their

eyes to heaven. But the heavens didn't turn toward them. They remained silent. And the Huns took what they wanted. No lightning, no miracle, no savior. Only prayers in the dust, trampled under boots, torn apart by the laughter of the horde.

The Huns knew no such words. Their prayer was a cry in battle, a laughter over wine, a groan in the tent. Honest, direct, fleeting. No promises, no hope. Only the here and now, so sharp it cut.

But the Pope spoke prayers as if he could negotiate with nothingness. He threw words into the sky like coins into a hole. He hoped something would come back. But nothing came. Only dust. Always dust.

Attila said: "A prayer is only breath. And breath ceases when the throat is cut." That was the truth of the steppe. No paradise, no heaven, no answer. Only dust dancing over the bodies.

Thus ended every Roman prayer: not in the ears of a god, but in the dirt beneath the boots of the Huns. A prayer in the dust – silent, worthless, endless.

## Everything burns, everything laughs

Fire was the true ruler of the steppe. It needed no throne, no crown, no name. It devoured, it lit, it destroyed, and it was always hungry. Everything burned eventually when the Huns came. Villages, fields, houses, barns—no matter whether they were made of wood, straw, or stone. Fire consumed faster than greed.

Attila knew that no sword was as powerful as a torch. One blow could kill a man. A fire could destroy a city. Simple, cheap, merciless. A few sparks, and the Romans ran like rats from their holes. And the Huns laughed as the sky turned red.

The Romans built walls, thick and high, full of pride. But walls couldn't hold fire. It crept over them, under them, through them. It devoured beams, burned gates, turned palaces into ovens. And while they screamed, while they prayed, while they tried to pour water on the flames, the Huns stood there, torches in hand, and laughed.

The laughter wasn't just malicious joy. It was freedom. Fire destroyed everything, made everyone equal. A senator burned just as quickly as a farmer. A temple went up in flames just as easily as a barn. And that pleased the Huns. No god, no emperor, no wealth could be saved. Everything turned to ash.

Attila saw fire as truth. "Everything you build ends here," he said, pointing to the flames. "Your glory, your gold, your prayers—the fire consumes everything." And he was right. For in the end, all that remained was smoke, only embers, only the laughter of the men holding the torches.

Everything was burning. Everyone was laughing. And therein lay the freedom of the steppe.

For the Romans, a city was a sanctuary. Stone upon stone, walls, temples, squares. They thought it would last forever. But a city was nothing but dry wood when the Huns came. Cities burned like torches, large, bright, stank of death and hope, which vanished in the smoke.

Attila loved this sight. He didn't always ride into battle, but he was always there when the fire ignited. He stood on a hill, watched the flames rise into the night, saw towers melt like candles, roofs collapse. It was as if the whole city was screaming. And that was music.

The Romans ran. Senators in purple togas stumbled next to beggars. Priests who had praised God only yesterday now screamed like pigs. Children turned to smoke, women to ash, men to shadows. No one escaped the fire. No statue, no emperor, no cross.

The Huns threw torches, tipped barrels, and laughed like drunks playing a game. To them, a city was nothing more than a large bonfire. Bread, wine, gold—everything was plundered. The rest was fuel. They stood there, their faces blackened by smoke, drinking and shouting as the walls crumbled.

Attila knew: fire made everyone equal. Rome was proud of its order, its classes, its laws. But when the flames rose, everything melted. Poor, rich, holy, guilty—all burned equally. A city was nothing more than a torch waiting to be lit.

The steppe had no cities. And perhaps that was its advantage. Nothing that could burn, nothing that could turn to ash. Only wind, only grass, only sky. But the Romans built, and the Huns set fire to it. The cycle was that simple.

Cities like torches—that was the Horde's truth. And no one could extinguish it.

Fire has its own voice. It crackles, it roars, it whistles through beams that break. But louder than the flames was the laughter of the Huns. Men, black with smoke, wine in their beards, blood on their hands—they laughed while entire cities screamed.

Attila knew that laughter. It wasn't a simple chuckle, not a polite grin. It was raw, deep, belly-like. A laugh that came from the throat like an animal roaring. It was the laughter of men who knew they were allowed to do anything. Men who heard the screams of others as music.

The Romans called it madness. For them, fire was a catastrophe, a divine sign, a punishment. For the Huns, it was a celebration. Every scream was a toast, every flame a dance. They threw barrels into the flames, watched them explode, and laughed as if they'd seen a play.

Children cried, women pleaded, men fell from walls. But laughter drowned everything. It was as if the Huns saw a second world through the fire—a world in which only they lived, and everyone else burned.

Attila himself rarely laughed. But in the flames, he smiled. A cold, brief twitch was enough. He knew: This laughter made his men stronger than any sermon, than any Roman discipline. It was the laughter of freedom. Freedom that burned, stank, and danced.

The fire consumed, the walls creaked, the sky was red—and in the midst of it all, the laughter of the Huns sounded, louder than bells, louder than prayers. A laughter that said: Everything belongs to us. Everything burns, everyone laughs.

Kings wore gold, precious stones, and laurel wreaths. Everything shone, everything was meant to look eternal. But Attila's crown was smoke. Black, thick, acrid. Smoke that hung over burning cities, that crept into the sky like a curse. Smoke as a crown—more honest than any gold.

When the Huns burned a city, the smoke was proof of their victory. It was visible for miles around, a banner no painter needed to paint. The sky itself inscribed their dominion in black ink. "Here we were," said the smoke. "Nothing remains here."

Attila loved this sight. He rode hills, watched the smoke rise above towers, broad and fat like a throne built by heaven itself. He needed no purple, no court, no coins bearing his face. He had smoke, and that was enough.

The Romans hated this smoke. For them, it was shame, a sign of loss, of failure. For the Huns, it was adornment. Men rubbed the soot on their faces as if it were the colors of a festival. They drank as the smoke gnawed at their throats and laughed. "This is our crown," they said, "and it fits everyone."

The steppe knew no crowns. Only sky, wind, and dust. Attila needed no artificial splendor. His crown was fleeting, but real. Smoke rising from cities that would never be again. Smoke that showed more power than any gold.

Because gold could be stolen. Crowns could be broken. But smoke? Smoke remained as long as the fire consumed. It rose, showing the world that here reigned one whom no god, no emperor, no priest could stop.

Attila's crown was smoke. And as long as he laughed, it rose higher than any Roman symbol.

Fire consumed everything—wood, stone, flesh, memories. But what remained was ash. And the ash always found its way into the mouth. It stuck to the lips, it bit the teeth, it made every breath difficult. Ash in the mouth, that was the aftertaste of every victory.

Attila felt it too. Even when he wasn't laughing, even when he was just sitting on his horse, the wind brought it to him. Fine, gray, bitter. It was like a mockery. "You have won," whispered the ash, "but now you taste what's left of it."

The Huns accepted this. They coughed, spat black, but laughed anyway. "Better ash in the mouth than hunger in the stomach," they said. For them, the bitter taste was merely proof that they were full, that they had won. Every cough was a toast.

The Romans, on the other hand, hated the ashes. For them, it represented shame, defeat, a reminder that everything they had built was turning to dust. Senators in red robes, priests in golden chains—they coughed like dogs when the ashes crept down their throats. They tasted ruin, and it tasted of filth.

Attila knew: Ashes in the mouth were more honest than any song later sung about victories. No glory, no splendor, no laurel. Only dust crunching between the teeth. That was the truth of war.

In the end, nothing sweet, nothing holy remained. Only ash, which made everyone equal—victors and losers, Huns and Romans. Everyone breathed it,

everyone tasted it. And it reminded everyone: Everything burns, everything laughs—and everything ends in ash.

For the Romans, ruin meant an end. For the Huns, it was a celebration. When walls crept, when screams died away, when the sky turned black, they laughed. Laughter in ruin—that was the music that echoed through the steppe.

Attila knew that laughter. It came deep, raw, sometimes almost hoarse from the smoke burning their throats. But it always came. Even when men died, even when blood flowed, even when someone lay in the dirt, the Huns laughed. They didn't laugh because it was beautiful. They laughed because they lived while everything else perished.

The Romans didn't understand this. For them, laughing in the face of destruction was madness. For the Huns, it was freedom. When everything burned, when everything collapsed, there was no longer a god, no emperor, no laws. Only smoke, flames—and laughter rising above it all.

Attila himself rarely laughed aloud. But he allowed his men to laugh, screaming, yelling, singing among the rubble. It was important to him. Laughter held them together, made them stronger than any order. It was the bond that no betrayal could break: the knowledge that one could laugh even when the world was falling apart.

The Romans prayed when they perished. The Huns laughed. And therein lay the difference. A prayer fell into the void, a laugh cut through the smoke. A prayer begged for mercy, a laugh spat in the face of mercy.

Laughter in the face of destruction was the Huns' last weapon. It made them invincible because even in the end, they still found victory. Not in gold, not in ruins—but in the feeling that their laughter was louder than death.

## The Brother's Shadow

Blood was supposed to bind people together. Brothers, family, clan. That's what the ancients told around the fire, that's what the songs sang, that's what the Romans lied about in their fairy tales of ancestors and gods. But Attila knew: blood was a bad contract. Brothers could be closer to the knife than enemies.

Your brother's shadow was always there. When you slept, when you drank, when you laughed—he stood behind you, with a gaze that wanted more than he let on. Brothers shared your childhood, your flesh, your stories. And that's precisely why they knew where you were weak. No stranger could cut as deeply as a brother.

Attila remembered nights riding alongside brothers, shoulder to shoulder, facing the same enemy. But in their eyes, there was more than hatred for Rome. There was hunger. There was envy. There was the knife that still waited.

The Huns knew: brothers were no security. They were merely competitors with the same father. "Blood blinds," they said, "and blindness kills." Many died because they believed a brother would never betray them. They died quickly, with surprise in their eyes when the knife came.

Attila saw it soberly. "A brother is an enemy with patience," he said. And he lived by it. No oath, no song, no embrace deceived him. He expected the betrayal, and that's precisely why he survived.

The brother's shadow was longer than any wall, darker than any night. And it never left.

Brothers don't grow in love, they grow in dust. There are no golden cradles, no sacred vows, only hunger, quarrels, and beatings. Childhood on the steppe was not a fairy tale, but a competition. Even as children, brothers learned that one only grew stronger when the other was weaker.

Attila remembered the dust that always hung in the air, in his eyes, in his throat. Brothers didn't play; they wrestled, they hit, they bit. A bone as a toy, a horse as a prize, a cup of water as a reason for a fight. Childhood was a battleground, not a paradise.

The elders said, "Brothers stick together." But they knew it was a lie. They said it so the horde wouldn't immediately fall to pieces. In truth, every brother was a competitor, from the very first breath. Whoever ran faster got more milk.

Whoever hit harder got more bread. Whoever picked up the knife first survived.

Attila had brothers who were close to him, but never friendly. They slept in the same tents, shared the same hunger, the same dreams. But there was always something dark in their eyes. A reminder of every small defeat, every wound, every humiliation. Brothers forgot nothing. They gathered silently, and the dust preserved it.

The Romans spoke of childhood as an innocent time. Attila spat on this idea. Childhood on the steppe was nothing less than the first school of betrayal. You learn early on that trust is just a game. You learn early on that blood is thinner than it looks.

And when the brothers grew up, the dust remained within them. Every childhood spent in the dust was a shadow that never disappeared. A shadow that returned one day with a knife.

Two brothers side by side on horses – it looked like unity. Dust behind them, enemy before them, the same swords, the same breath. But that was only the surface. Beneath the skin, behind their gazes, more and more was brewing. Two riders, one goal – and each wanted to arrive first.

Attila knew this feeling. Riding beside a brother meant strength. You knew he would charge into battle with you. But you also knew he would leave you behind if he got the chance. Every hoofbeat was not only against the enemy, but also against the man beside you.

The steppe turned it into a game. Whoever rode faster got the first blow. Whoever plundered first got the first wine, the first woman, the first gold. Brothers didn't just fight against Romans or Goths—they fought against each other, invisible, but always there. Two riders, one goal—but only one could return home satisfied.

The Romans told fairy tales of brothers who became heroes together. Attila laughed. "Your heroes would slit each other's throats at night if there were even a piece of gold between them," he said. And he was right. On the steppe, every ride was a race, and brothers were no exception.

Attila knew that this tension never went away. Even when they fought together, even when they rode side by side, the shadow remained. A brother

was never just a brother. He was a mirror, a rival, an enemy—all at once. And that made him more dangerous than any Roman.

Two riders, one target. But always two knives waiting for each other's backs.

The night was never silent. Horses snorted, men snored, fires crackled. But the loudest silence came when someone reached for a dagger. The dagger in the night was the most honest communication between brothers. No long words, no grand oaths. Just a cut, quick, quiet, final.

Attila knew: A brother who laughed by day could stand over you with cold eyes at night. In the darkness, everyone was equal—friend, foe, family. Everything disappeared except the blade. The dagger decided who woke up and who was silenced.

Many Huns told stories around the fire about brothers who died this way. No war, no battle, no Romans—just a dagger in the tent, between the ribs or the throat. Sometimes for a woman, sometimes for gold, sometimes for an old game of dust that was never forgotten. Brothers accumulated debts, and the night was the hour to collect them.

The Romans called it treason. They believed in order, in laws, in family. Attila spat on these concepts. "You call treason what we call nature," he said. Because on the steppe, the dagger in the night was not a crime, but proof. Proof that someone was stronger, wiser, more patient.

Attila himself never slept deeply. He kept his sword close, trusting no shadow. Not even his brother's. He knew: The night was the true judge, and the dagger was its judgment. Whoever survived was right. Whoever died was unlucky. It was that simple.

The dagger in the night made every family honest. Brothers who rode shoulder to shoulder by day knew that at night, everything could end. And that's precisely why the brother's shadow was longer than any other.

In the morning, nothing was hidden anymore. The fire had burned down, the smoke hung languidly, and the light crept over every stain left by the night. Blood in the morning light was merciless. It glowed red, it glistened, it screamed voicelessly: Something has happened here, and no one wants to admit it.

Attila had seen it many times. A tent that was silent. Too silent. Men who couldn't get out. Horses that pawed nervously. Then a glimpse inside: one of

them was lying there, eyes open, throat open, and the brother beside him acted as if surprised. But everyone knew what had happened. Blood in the morning light was more honest than any words.

The Huns rarely reacted. Sometimes a shrug, sometimes a quiet laugh. "One less," they said. Because everyone knew it could have happened to them, too. No trial, no verdict, no remembrance. Just a body dragged from the tent, and blood drying in the dust.

The Romans would have revolted, investigated, and punished. But the steppe didn't work that way. On the steppe, blood in the morning light wasn't a scandal. It was a reminder. A warning. A sign that you had to keep your eyes open. Always.

Attila took advantage of this. He knew that brothers distrusted each other, that every shadow lengthened as the sun rose. He didn't need executioners. The men executed themselves, at night, quietly, brutally. By morning, everything was done. Not a word, not a complaint. Only blood in the morning light, which everyone saw and understood.

And the sun continued to shine. The day continued. The horde moved on. Blood in the morning light was just another part of the landscape, as normal as dust, as wind, as death.

A brother could die. He could lie in the dust, blood pouring from his throat, his eyes empty. He could disappear, be forgotten, buried beneath cold grass. But the shadow remained. Brothers died, but their shadows lived on. They clung to the survivors, moving like smoke through the tents, like dust through the throat.

Attila knew he would never be free of these shadows. Even if someone was dead, they crept through dreams at night. Even if they were slain, they could be heard in the horses' hooves, in the flames, in the men's laughter. The shadow remained, whether one wanted it or not.

The Huns lived with these shadows. They didn't bury graves with stones, nor made great mourning. They left the corpses in the dust or burned them in the wind. But the shadows never left. They remained as mistrust, as fear, as a dark gaze. Every brother who fell left behind more than a body—they left behind a hole filled with suspicion.

The Romans spoke of reconciliation, of peace in death. Attila spat on such fairy tales. "Your peace is a lie," he said. "Your dead laugh at you." For there was no peace on the steppe. There was only memory, bitter, merciless. The shadow remained and continued to devour.

Attila turned this into strength. He carried the shadows not as a burden, but as a weapon. Every shadow of a brother was a knife in his back—and that's precisely why he never slept deeply, never drank too much, never trusted too much. He knew: The shadows were there, and they made him stronger.

So it remained: brothers came and went, knives flashed, blood flowed. But the shadow remained. Always. And that was perhaps the cruelest truth of the steppe.

## Gold that no one can satisfy

Gold glittered in the sun, heavy in sacks, cold in the hands. Men killed for it, men sold their children, their wives, their dignity for it. But gold didn't satisfy hunger. It looked like bread when it lay on a plate, but you couldn't chew it. It looked like meat when it glittered in the fire, but it only burned you. Gold was the great deceiver who drove everyone crazy.

Attila knew this. He had seen sacks full of gold, mountains of coins, jewelry that filled entire palaces. He had seen Romans bathing in gold, counting it, stacking it, kissing it. And he had seen those same Romans starve because they thought the shining metal could save them. But gold never fed anyone. It only made them hungrier.

The Huns viewed gold differently. For them, it was a tool. Something to buy wine, women, weapons. But if you left them only the gold and no loot, it was worthless. A sack full of coins wasn't worth half as much as a barrel of wine or a horse to carry you. And yet they collected it, because the Romans loved it. Gold was the hook on which you could catch entire cities.

The hunger for gold was worse than the hunger for bread. Bread made you weak, gold drove you mad. Men forgot their brothers, their wives, their children—all for a piece of metal that didn't even provide warmth in the fire. Attila saw it and laughed. "Your god shines," he said, "but he doesn't feed you."

And so the horde rode on, plundering cities, hoarding gold, sometimes throwing it into the dirt, stepping on it, laughing at it. For they knew: gold is hunger in shining form. And hunger could never satisfy anyone.

Gold stank. It didn't smell of bread, wine, or meat. It smelled of decay. Of hands stuck to it, of blood drying on it, of pockets filled with it while children starved beside it. Coins always carried the stench of those who died for it.

Attila had seen mountains of coins. Romans shoveling them into sacks, priests stuffing them into altars, merchants hoarding them in cellars. And always the same smell. Not the shine they wanted to see, but the stench they tried to cover up—with incense, with perfume, with sordid stories about value. But the smell remained. Coins that smelled like rot.

The Huns laughed at this. They took the coins, threw them into bags, and tied them to their saddles. But they knew: this metal couldn't satisfy hunger, heal wounds, or warm a tent. It was just something that drove others crazy. They traded it when they had to, for wine, women, and horses. But when push came to shove, they left it behind in the dust. No one rode for coins when their stomach was empty.

Attila knew that the Romans were slaves to their coins. They held them like amulets, praying to them like a god. But what they had in their hands was only rotten metal, stinking of blood, sweat, and fear. He once said: "You hold your gods in your pockets, and they stink worse than your corpses."

And that's exactly why it worked. The Romans gave everything for gold. They betrayed friends, they sold daughters, they opened city gates. And the Huns? They held their noses, took the coins, laughed—and left the Romans in their own stench.

Gold shone, yes. But it always smelled like death.

They collected it. They stacked it. They piled it up like hay, like grain, like meat. Except gold was inedible. Mountains that no one could eat—that was Rome's disease.

Attila once stood before such a mountain. A treasure as tall as a horse, shining, heavy, full of coins, chains, chalices. An entire warehouse of metal. Men guarded it as if it were life itself. But when the Huns broke in, when they slaughtered the guards, Attila stood before it and spat. "You hoard this like bread, but it doesn't satisfy hunger."

He was right. You could have a thousand coins in your hand, but when your stomach growled, hunger would still consume you. You could put gold in your mouth, bite into it, hear it crunch in your teeth—but it wouldn't fill you up. It was cold, bitter, useless.

The Romans loved their mountains of gold. They built them like religions. Entire families were formed around them, entire wars were fought over them. But in the end, it was just a shining pile that you couldn't eat, drink, or love. A pile that would crush you rather than save you.

The Huns knew this. They didn't build mountains of gold. They piled up wine, meat, women, horses. Things that truly fed you, that kept you alive. If they took gold, it was only to get rid of it. To make Romans dance for it like pigs before a bucket.

Attila saw the Romans staring greedily at their mountains. He knew this greed would be their downfall. They built towers of gold while their children chewed bones. They clutched coins while their wives drank water that tasted of dirt. Mountains no one could eat. And that was the joke: the higher they climbed, the hungrier they became.

The steppe laughed at such mountains. The wind blew over them, dust settled on them, and in the end they were nothing but shiny dirt.

Fire was fast. It burned down houses in hours, cities in days. But greed? Greed devoured even faster. It went through hearts, through hands, through eyes. It devoured brothers, it devoured nations, it devoured empires. Greed was a fire that never went out.

Attila had seen men overturn wine barrels just to scrape a few coins out of the dirt. He had seen brothers draw knives because one of them stared at a gold piece too long. He had seen Romans who would rather let their children starve than open a purse. Greed made you blind, deaf, hungry—always hungry.

The Huns knew how fire worked. They threw a torch, and the city went up. But greed didn't need a torch. It was in every look, in every hand, in every silent night. One person counted coins, one craved more, and a dagger was on its way.

The Romans had more gold than anyone else. But that's precisely why their greed consumed them first. Senators who poisoned each other. Merchants who delivered their partners to the gallows. Priests who sold blessings only to

put chains around their necks. Greed turned them into animals, worse than any fire.

Attila understood this. "We burn their cities," he said, "but their greed burns them." And he was right. Fire could be put out if you were quick enough. But greed? It continued to consume, even when nothing remained. It consumed the soul, the mind, the last shred of humanity.

The Huns had their own greed, yes. But it was simple: wine, women, horses, meat. Things you needed immediately, things you could enjoy immediately. Their greed was honest, swift, and direct. The Romans' greed was sick, endless, and cold. They wanted mountains of gold that no one could eat. They wanted power that crushed them.

In the end, greed consumed faster than fire. Fire left behind ashes. Greed left only emptiness.

Gold didn't satisfy, it made you sick. It was like poison—glittering, seductive, sweet in the first moment, deadly the next. A drop in your blood, and you wanted more. A coin in your hand, and your fingers wanted a hundred. Gold was like poison, slow, insidious, but always deadly.

Attila had seen it. Romans kneeling before treasures as if kneeling before gods. Eyes glazed, mouths open, hands trembling. They clutched gold pieces as if they were hearts. But their own hearts had long since been poisoned. The metal crept in, blinding them, making them weak.

The Huns viewed gold soberly. They took it because it was useful—to drive Romans mad, to open markets, to fill tents with wine. But they knew: anyone who stared at too much of it would become sick. Some of them felt it. Men who counted coins instead of taking women. Men who hoarded purses instead of drinking wine. Attila didn't let them go on for long. "Poisoned men are no good," he said, and most of them soon ended up lying in the dust.

The poison wasn't in the metal itself, but in your head. Gold told you lies: that you would become immortal, that you would be loved, that you would be free. But all you got was fear. Fear of losing it. Fear that someone was standing behind you, ready to rip the poison from your hand again.

The Romans lived in this fear. They locked their poison in chests, in temples, in castles. But the poison always found a way. A servant who stole. A brother who

murdered. A people who starved and broke down their gates. Gold was a poison that ate through everything.

The steppe knew other poisons: hunger, cold, thirst. But those passed if you were strong. But gold remained as long as it glittered. It devoured Romans, it devoured empires, it devoured entire empires. Attila grinned and said: "You won't die because of us. You'll die from your own poison."

And so it was.

Shine was never free. It looked cheap when it lay in the sun, when coins flashed, when chains sparkled. But the price behind it was always high. The price of shine was blood, broken bones, burned cities, men lying in the dust, and women selling what was left to them.

Attila understood this. Every shiny coin had a story. A scream behind it, a cut, a murder. No one found gold in the dirt without someone else dying for it. The shine was just the packaging. The price was invisibly written on it—and it was always higher than one thought.

The Romans saw the splendor and forgot the price. They saw chalices, crowns, statues. But they didn't see the bones on which these things stood. They saw palaces, but not the children who died building them. They saw splendor, but not the blood. Attila grinned when he saw them. "You think you're rich," he said, "but you're just debtors. You've borrowed more blood than you can ever repay."

The Huns knew this price. They were the price. Their fire, their steel, their hunger—that was the currency with which splendor was paid. They knew: If you take gold, you also take the shadows that cling to it. They laughed, they drank, they lived fast, because they knew that in the end, all splendor would turn to dust.

The price was never fair. One died, one laughed. One starved, one gorged himself. But the glamour always made it the same: It only showed the winner, never the dead. Attila saw it differently. For him, the price was more honest than the glamour. Blood was real, pain was real. The glamour was only an illusion.

This is how the steppe lived: It accepted the prize, but it laughed at the glitter. For in the end, it was worthless.

Gold made your hands heavy. Bags, chains, coins—they pulled you down, made you clatter like a cart full of iron. But in the end, everyone died empty-handed. No gold to grasp, no glitter to go with you. Only a heavy shadow that lay upon you as your body grew cold.

Attila knew this. He had seen men sorting coins in tents until their fingers bled. Men guarding their treasures like dogs, with drawn knives, with sleepless eyes. And in the end, they lay there, dead, their gold scattered, trampled by horses, picked up in the dust by children. Empty hands, heavy shadows.

The Romans believed they could take the gold with them. They built tombs full of coins, jewelry, and wreaths. But the steppe laughed at them. Horses ran over the tombs, grave robbers opened the stones, and the gold moved on. The dead man was left behind, thin, empty, forgotten. Only the shadow of his hunger remained.

The Huns knew: gold was just a tool. Useful as long as you were breathing. But when your lungs stopped, it was nothing. A stone, cold, useless. A dead man had no pockets. A dead man had only shadows.

Attila wore this thought like a knife in his belt. "Take while you can," he said. "But don't think it will save you." He rode through the Romans' gold, trampled on it, and laughed at the men who died for it. It was clear to him: You could gather mountains, but you still died empty-handed. And the only thing that remained was the shadow your greed left behind.

The Romans wept when they noticed it. The Huns laughed. But in the end, everyone lay there the same way—hands empty, shadows heavy.

## Hunger rides faster than fame

The belly was the true king of the steppe. No sword, no throne, no glory could compete with it. When the belly growled, men became beasts. Glory was a song one only sang when one was full. But hunger—hunger rode ever faster, bit harder, roared louder.

Attila knew this. He could tell stories, he could promise loot, he could drive men with fear. But when the belly was empty, when the ribs cut through the skin, then no song and no glory helped. Then men wanted meat, wine, and bread. Fame couldn't be chewed.

The steppe taught this every day. You could have ten victories, a hundred slain enemies, sacks of gold as high as the sky. But if you had no horse to carry you, no meat to sustain you, then you died like a dog in the dust. Fame remained behind, hunger took you away.

The Romans lived off fame. They built statues, inscribed names on stones, and sang songs about heroes. But heroes starved just like beggars. Attila laughed when he heard their stories. "Your fame stinks of empty stomachs," he said. And he was right.

The Huns were more honest. They hunted, they ate, they drank. Only then did they laugh. Fame was a fog, hunger was real. They knew that the gut ruled, not the head. The gut commanded when to move, when to fight, when to murder. The gut was the true ruler, and it couldn't be bribed with glory.

So hunger rode ever faster. Faster than fame, faster than gold, faster than any lie.

Glory was a song, sung by men with full stomachs and cups in hand. But hunger knew no songs. Hunger spoke in bones. Bones that protruded from the skin, bones that lay in the dust, bones that cracked when someone was too weak to ride any further.

Attila saw it often. Men who once laughed, now silent, with eyes as empty as their stomachs. Heroes celebrated in songs knelt on the ground, gnawing on the remains of a horse bone that had long since lost its flesh. Fame had given them no strength, no song had satisfied them. Only bones remained.

The steppe was cruel. It took what you had, until only skeletons remained. Fame vanished in the wind, but bones remained. Bones were honest. They told you that someone had died here—not from enemies, not in battle, but from hunger.

The Romans continued to sing their heroic songs. Men with names like thunder, with stories that moved mountains. But even these names died when the stomach was empty. No song filled the stomach, no glory brought bread. In the end, all that remained of their heroes were bones, bleached, scattered, forgotten.

The Huns knew: hunger was stronger than any song. They didn't laugh at it; they respected it. They knew that a man who went hungry for too long was no

longer a brother, no longer a friend. He was an animal that looked at you like prey. Bones spoke louder than any song.

And Attila said: “When your heroes starve, your bones sing.”

Nothing turned men into beasts faster than an empty pot. A pot that stank of meat yesterday, but today was just dry iron. An empty pot meant more than hunger. It meant hatred. Hatred of brothers, hatred of enemies, hatred of the whole world that gave you nothing but dust between your teeth.

Attila had seen it: a horde of men, tired, dirty, growling, before them an empty pot. No broth, no bones, not even fat. Only black soot on the bottom. And in their eyes was a hatred more deadly than any battle. For hunger didn't just devour the belly, it devoured the heart, it devoured reason.

The Romans thought discipline held men together. Laws, orders, songs. But Attila knew: an empty pot would break everything. Men wouldn't follow an emperor, a king, or a god if they had nothing to eat. They would only follow the one who gave them meat. Everything else was a lie.

The Huns knew this hatred. They didn't fear it; they used it. An empty pot was like a torch. It burned in people's minds, preparing men to tear down cities, plunder villages, and devour fields. Attila left the pots empty when he needed hatred. And he filled them when he needed peace. Power was that simple.

Hate was heavier than glory. Glory was a song sung in taverns. Hate was a knife drawn at night. An empty pot made all the difference. And Attila knew that no glory in the world could stop men who had hunger and hatred in their bellies.

So hunger rode ever faster. The pot was empty, but anger was full.

The stomach beat louder than any war horn. When it was empty, it boomed like a drum, deep, hard, unstoppable. Men didn't march to songs; they marched to the rhythm of their growling bellies. The stomach was the drum that drove them to war.

Attila often heard it at night. The growling, the groaning, the crackling of his men's entrails. Entire armies, each belly singing its own song. Together, it sounded like a dark chorus, a rhythm that said: "Get us meat, or we'll tear it ourselves."

The Romans built drums, horns, and fanfares. They wanted order in war, marching steps, and discipline. But the Huns needed none of that. Their

stomachs kept time. When they were empty, they ran faster, beat harder, and shouted louder. Hunger made them wilder than any horn call.

Attila knew how to exploit this rhythm. He let his men starve before sending them into battle. No feast, no full stomachs—just growling drums in their guts. Then he pointed at the city, at the villages, and they charged like wolves tearing the moon apart. Their stomachs were their war drum, and they obeyed it more than any command.

The steppe was a constant concert of these drums. Children wept, women suffered, men growled. Hunger drummed within everyone. But those strong enough to follow it became predators. Those weak fell – and became prey themselves.

Fame was a song that faded. Hunger was a blow that never ceased. The stomach was a drum, and it drove the Huns faster than any legend could ever describe.

Fame sounded noble. It sounded like honor, like heroes, like songs that would still be sung a hundred years from now. But fame was nothing more than a full belly with a beautiful name. No one sang about the heroes who starved. No one wrote songs about those who lay in the dust because they were too weak to find a piece of bread.

Attila knew this. He heard the songs of the Romans, of men who won battles, who supposedly became immortal. But when you parsed the stories apart, all that remained was the same: They had won because they were full. They had celebrated because their bellies were full. Fame was just another word for meat in the pot, wine in the cup, bread in the stomach.

The Huns made no secret of it. They didn't sing great heroic songs. They laughed when they were full, and they remained silent when they were hungry. It was that simple. They didn't need a statue, a ballad. A full belly was glory enough.

The Romans confused cause and effect. They believed fame brought strength. But strength came from meat, wine, and blood. Fame was the fairy tale told afterward, after the bones were broken and the stomachs were full. Attila spat on this fairy tale. "You eat, and then you sing. We eat, and then we laugh. That's the difference."

A hungry man didn't believe in fame. He believed in the next piece of meat, the next animal he could hunt. Only when his belly was still could he pretend to be a hero. But until then, fame was just a word that sounded as empty as a hollow pot.

That's how the steppe saw it: fame was just a full belly with a pretty name.

The steppe didn't lie. It had no statues, no poets, no priests shouting words into the wind. The steppe was hungry. Hunger was the truth no one could deny. Everything else—fame, gods, honor—was just dust blown away by the wind.

Attila rode through this truth, day after day. He saw it in the empty faces, in the thin arms, in the eyes that fixed on anything that looked like flesh. Hunger made you honest. You couldn't hide hunger. It was in your face, it pulled you together, it roared louder than any heroic song.

The Romans tried to cover up the truth. They built temples, they sang hymns, they told fairy tales. But when the fields were empty, when supplies dwindled, their lies died too. No glory could drown hunger. No god could feed it. No pope could bless it.

The Huns accepted this. They didn't live in fairy tales. They knew that hunger was the currency with which everything was paid. Women, loyalty, courage—everything could be bought if one's stomach was empty enough. Hunger was the knife that cut through all oaths.

Attila called him "the Judge." Hunger decided who was strong, who was weak, who lived, and who died. Hunger knew no mercy, no lies. He took everything apart and revealed the core. And the core was always the same: an animal that ate or died.

That's how the steppe saw it: hunger was the truth, the rest was just decoration.

In the end, nothing remained but the last bite. No song, no gold, no glory. Just a piece of meat between the teeth, perhaps a sip of wine, perhaps a bone that still yielded marrow. Whoever had the last bite laughed. Whoever had none died. The world was that simple, and the steppe made no concessions.

Attila knew this. He saw men defending the last piece of bread with bloody fingers as if it were a crown. He saw men drawing knives just to get the last piece of a bone that someone else had already sucked clean. No glory in this

spectacle. No song. Only hunger, and the laughter of one who chewed the last bit while the other lay in the dust.

The Romans told stories of the "final victory." Of heroes who left behind songs as they died. But Attila knew the truth: If you had anything left when you died, it was a bite. And if you were lucky, you could laugh while you did it—a laugh that said, "I won because I die full." Fame? Screw fame. The final bite was the only monument.

The Huns understood this better than anyone else. They lived fast, they ate, they drank, they laughed as long as they could. Because they knew: In the end, only those with something left in their stomachs laugh. The rest were dead, forgotten, a history that no one told.

The last bite decided who was the winner. The last bite decided who laughed. Fame rides behind, lame, useless. Hunger rides ahead, and whoever feeds it has the last laugh.

So it all ended: no song, no gold, no glory – just one last bite and the laughter that came from a full belly.

## The last night with red skies

The sky turned red, not like a romantic twilight, not like some picture a Roman painter might have painted on his walls. No—the sky burned, as if the gods themselves had set fire to their own shithouse. Clouds like flesh bursting open. Blood on the horizon. A sky that laughed and vomited at the same time.

Attila sat there, his horse stamping restlessly, the men behind him silent. Even the Huns, who usually laughed when cities burned, kept quiet. Because they sensed that this sky was more than light. It was a sign, a warning, a threat. Red as blood, red as anger, red as the last breath.

One could have said, "Beautiful." But on the steppe, "beautiful" usually meant "dangerous." A red sky wasn't a poem; it was a knife pressed into your neck. It told you: "Today, someone will die, maybe you, maybe everyone." And everyone felt that weight.

The Romans saw such a sky and wrote poems. The Huns saw it and reached for their weapons. Attila spat in the dust and grinned. "The gods shit fire," he said.

"And we ride through it." He was right. Because no matter what was in the sky, the Huns rode. Hunger, greed, anger—those were the gods they knew.

The red sky wasn't Rome, wasn't God, wasn't fate. It was merely a mirror. A mirror for what was happening beneath it. Blood, death, fire. And Attila knew: It was the last night. Not because he was weak. Not because he was tired. But because the sky itself was already turning to blood.

The fire didn't just strike the sky, it struck the men. They rode, they sat, they drank—and yet they all cast the same shadows. Long, sharp, distorted figures crawling across the dust as if trying to flee. Men like shadows in the fire, and everyone knew: shadows had no soul.

Attila saw them sitting around the fire, their faces half in the light, half in the darkness. Teeth flashed, eyes flickered, but the rest disappeared in the red. It was as if the sky had already swallowed them, as if they were mere husks, ready to turn to dust. They laughed, but their laughter sounded hollow, like bones clanging against each other.

The Romans said that shadows were merely images, tricks of the light. But the Huns knew: shadows were the truth. They showed how thin the line was between man and nothingness. Today a warrior, tomorrow a shadow, the day after that mere dust. The fire burned, the sky glowed, and the shadows were already creeping ahead.

Attila felt the weight. Every man sitting behind him was already half gone. They were all fighting, they were all laughing, they were all eating – but the red sky turned them into silhouettes, drawn on a canvas of blood. Men like shadows, transient, interchangeable. Only death painted that night.

The sky wasn't just red, it was hungry. It drew the men into itself, one by one, as if gathering their shadows. Attila knew: the fire above was the same as the fire below. It devoured. And the men were nothing but fuel.

The horses knew first. They stamped, they snorted, they raised their heads as if they had seen something the men missed. Horses smell the end long before it comes. They taste it in the dust, they hear it in the wind, they feel it in the ground.

Attila trusted his horses more than any seer. Men told you stories, gods whispered lies, but horses didn't lie. When they became restless, when they

opened their nostrils wide, there was something in the air. Something approaching. Something you couldn't stop.

That night, all the horses were nervous. They pulled at the ropes, tossed their manes, they wanted to escape. As if they knew that the red sky wasn't just a sky, but a curtain beyond which the end already lay. Their eyes gleamed white in the firelight, their bodies trembled, even though there was no cold.

The men cursed, kicked, and hit. But it didn't help. Horses knew the truth. They heard the footsteps that were still in the dark. They smelled the blood that hadn't yet been shed. They weren't heroes, they weren't poets—they were witnesses. And their panic was louder than any horn blast.

Attila placed a hand on his beast's neck, felt the trembling, the racing heart. He simply nodded. "Yes," he murmured. "I smell it too." For he wasn't blind. The sky, the fire, the shadows—everything spoke the same language. It was the language of the end.

The Romans trusted in cards, in numbers, in oracles. Attila trusted in horses. And that night, they told him everything. They shouted, without words, that the end was already approaching.

The wine flowed as it always did. Jugs, skins, cups—the Huns could drink until they dropped. But that night, the wine tasted different. Not sweet, not strong, not numbing. It tasted of ash. Every sip was like a burning sensation in the throat, dry, bitter, a harbinger.

Attila took the first sip and felt it immediately. The fire in heaven had poisoned the wine. He could drink as much as he wanted, but his thirst remained, and every drop tasted like it came straight from a burnt barrel. He pushed the jug away and laughed dryly. "Even the wine knows it's the last night."

The men continued drinking, but they also noticed it. They belched, they cursed, they tipped one cup after another—and yet it didn't get any easier. No intoxication, no forgetting. Only this weight that made their tongues tingle and their stomachs heavy. The wine that usually brought women and songs brought only silence today.

The Romans would have called it an omen. A priest would have invoked the gods, offered sacrifices, lit candles. The Huns didn't need a priest. They only needed their throats, and they would say: It's over. When even the wine tastes of ash, then the end is already in the cup.

Attila felt the dust on his tongue as he drank. He tasted the smoke, not yet there, but already filling everything. He knew: tomorrow, or soon, this taste would be real. No more wine, but fire in his throat, smoke in his lungs. Today was just the test.

Wine tastes like ash when the sky is red. And no song, no laughter, no dance could cover that up.

The men talked, cursed, laughed crookedly, sang dirty songs, even though their voices were shaky. But the women? They were silent. They sat in the tents, in the shadows, eyes dark, mouths closed. Women are silent like graves when the sky is red. They don't need words because they've long known what's coming.

Attila saw it. He knew this silence better than any screaming. When women were silent, something was wrong. Usually they talked, screamed for water, fought over children, cursed men. But on this night, there was no sound. Only the rustling of fabrics, the crackling of the fire. A silence that was heavier than any threat.

The Huns ignored it, pretending it didn't matter. But they felt it on the back of their necks. This silence was like a cold wind ripping through their bones. Men could lie, drink, and laugh. Women couldn't. They had a different perspective. They saw deeper, they smelled when something was rotting, they sensed the end before it came.

The Romans would have consulted their priestesses, offered sacrifices, and interpreted signs. But the Huns didn't need oracles. They only needed the women's silence. It said enough: "You're already dead, you just don't know it yet."

Attila remembered previous nights when women screamed, laughed, danced. That was life, that was warmth. But tonight, there was none of that. Their eyes were like holes staring into the dust. Their mouths like graves, closed, dark, full of secrets.

Women remain silent as graves when the earth already knows it will soon drink blood. And no man could break this silence. Not even Attila.

Laughter always died first. Even before the first man fell, before the first sword was drawn, before fire consumed cities—laughter died. It was like a dog that runs away when it smells danger. All that remained were voices, heavy, rough, and covered in dirt. But no more laughter.

Attila heard it. His horde was loud, always. They drank, they cursed, they told jokes that smelled of blood. But tonight, the laughter never came. Their throats were dry, their tongues heavy, their faces stiff. Men tried to force it out, like blood from a dead body. But what came out was only a croak, half cough, half rage.

The Romans called it an "omen." Attila called it "honest." Because laughter was a luxury. It only came when you were full, when you believed tomorrow was still here. And that night, everyone knew: tomorrow was gone. The sky had devoured it, red, greedily, mercilessly.

He watched the men pretending everything was normal. One told a story, one drank wine, one showed off scars. But no one laughed. Not really. They made noises that were meant to sound like laughter, but the steppe heard the difference. The steppe didn't laugh back.

Laughter dies first. Then the men die. It was always like this. Attila knew there was nothing he could do about it. No wine, no women, no prey could bring back laughter. It was gone, like an animal vanishing into the forest. And when it was gone, the end was near.

The steppe spoke through silence. Through the absence of laughter. Through the rumbling of bellies, the crackling of fire, the flapping of horses. Everything else was merely an illusion.

And Attila nodded. "Good," he thought. "The laughter is dead. Now we're honest."

Sometimes the sky just hung there, far away, untouchable, vast and indifferent. But this night it hung low, too low, as if it wanted to fall on the men. When the sky turned red, so red that even the fire looked small next to it, then it no longer seemed to be above you, but to crush you.

Attila felt it. Not just in his head, not just in his stomach—in his entire body. Every breath tasted of iron, every look upwards hurt, as if someone were pressing hot coals into your eyes. The sky was no longer heaven. It was a weight lying on you, making your bones crack, crushing your dreams.

The men saw it too. They looked up, then quickly back down again. Because they knew that this sky no longer promised anything. No tomorrow, no plunder, no victory. It only promised that it would soon come down and crush everything. Men, horses, tents, dreams. Everything.

The Romans would have said it was the end of the world. Attila laughed harshly, dryly. "The world ends every day," he said. "Only louder today." For him, this was no miracle, no divine sign. It was simply a consequence. Too much blood, too much fire, too much dust—at some point, the sky will fall because it no longer knows what to do with all the dirt.

And so the horde stood there, in the shadow of that burning roof. No one spoke, no one laughed. Horses snorted, women were silent, children slept badly. Attila rode a short distance, just to feel the pressure, the sky above him. It was as if he himself were about to crash into the dust, along with everything.

When the sky falls to the ground, there will be no song, no coin, no glory left. Only dust, blood, and an echo no one can understand.

## A king dies in the dirt

The throne was a lie. Wood, gold, iron—no matter what it was made of, in the end it was just dust. The Romans placed their emperors on it as if they were gods. The Huns laughed. A king didn't sit on a throne. A king sat in the saddle, in the dust, in the dirt. And when he fell, he fell back there.

Attila always knew it. He rode more than he sat. His ass knew the saddle better than any cushion. When he thought of "throne," he thought of a horse's back, the creaking of leather, the smell of sweat. Everything else was Roman bullshit, theater for idiots who believed power was a piece of furniture.

But in the end, even that didn't help. No horse, no saddle, no sword made you immortal. In the end, everyone lay in the dust, whether king or beggar. Attila felt that. It was coming closer, like a shadow you couldn't shake. Every breath tasted heavier, every day was darker. The sky burned, and the dirt waited.

The Romans would have summoned priests, murmured prayers, and gilded death. But Attila didn't need lies. He knew: when he left, he left like everyone else. No temple, no singing. Only dust in his mouth, blood in his throat, flies on his forehead. A king doesn't die differently; he just dies with more eyes watching.

And that was precisely the joke. The king was nothing special. The throne was always dust, and the end was always dirt. Attila grinned to himself. "So be it

then," he thought. "Screw the crown. I'll die the way I lived—with dirt on my hands."

Blood makes no noise when it suffocates you. No trumpet blast, no heroic chant, no god calling your name. It fills your throat, creeps into your lungs, runs through your nose like warm mud. And while outside men scream, horses snort, fires crackle – inside you die quietly.

Attila knew the feeling. Not from stories, not from songs, but real. That burning sensation when the blood no longer flows out, but in. When every breath becomes heavier, when every cough weakens you. No glory, no thunder. Only the sound of your own body drowning.

The Romans would have made it dramatic. An emperor dying in splendor, with a hundred men around him, with priests singing songs. But Attila? He knew how a king dies. Not in splendor. In the dirt. With blood in his throat, with flies on his face. Quietly. So quietly that you feel like a joke to yourself.

Men drinking outside might not even notice it right away. To them, it was just another wheeze, another noise in the night. But inside, it was everything. A sea swallowing you, without waves, without storm. Blood doesn't choke you like a sword—it caresses you to death.

Attila sensed the irony. The man who burned cities, made emperors tremble, who raged across lands like a storm—he died not by a sword, not by poison, not by betrayal. He died by himself. By blood he could no longer control. No enemy. Only his own body, saying, "Enough."

And so the king suffocated. Not loudly. Not gloriously. But quietly.

People expected swords. A king, they thought, must be struck down by a blade. By a dagger in the back, by a lance in the belly, by a battle that sprayed his blood onto the earth like wine from a broken skin. But Attila didn't die by iron. No sword, only silence.

It was the most brutal thing of all. No tale for bards, no heroic pose, no final blow. Just a body slowly collapsing. Men outside screamed, drank, swore. But inside there was nothing but the faint rattle of a throat that would never be freed.

The Romans would have made a play out of such an ending. They would have staged the king, written the scene, beat drums, and had priests speak. But in truth, death was never loud. It was silent, almost shameful. A body twitching, a

breath catching, a staring into nothingness. No applause, no fanfare. Just a silent disappearance.

Attila knew it in that moment. He felt that no enemy had written this end for him. No knife, no poison, no betrayal. Only the silence that comes after you think you've defeated it long ago. He had defeated Rome, broken emperors, and ridden down kings. But the silence? It couldn't be ridden, bought, or intimidated.

Men can fend off swords. They can fight, they can kill, they can run away. But silence always catches you. It sits on you, heavy, invisible. And when it's there, all that remains is this: no sword, only silence.

Thus the king fell. No enemy, no hero, no song. Only silence.

The horde snored as if nothing had happened. Horses lay with twitching flanks, men with half-open mouths, empty wineskins at their sides, swords next to hands they had long since let go of in their sleep. An entire army lay like a mountain of flesh, stinking of smoke, sweat, and cheap wine. They slept as if the world were still safe, as if there were a tomorrow that belonged to them.

And while they slept, the king died. No drum beat, no horn blew, no man leaped to his feet. Attila lay there, blood in his throat, his heart still pounding, but growing weaker. His breath sounded like an old bellows losing air. No sword, no scream, only the small, quiet wheeze of a man being devoured by the steppe, as it devours everything else.

The irony was sharp as a dagger. Outside, men slept who owed their lives to him. Men who had grown satiated by his victories, who had taken wives, plundered cities, and drunk wine because Attila made it possible. But now, on this night, no one was listening. They dreamed, they drooled, they lay in the dirt—while the king died next to them in the same dirt.

The Romans would have set up a guard, a hall full of eyes, a final speech, an imperial bed with red cloths. But the Huns had only the ground, the dust, the fire slowly dying out. And Attila had only his own wheezing, which no one heard because the horde was asleep.

That was the truth: Kings didn't die with trumpets blaring, but with snoring around them. With men too drunk to notice their ruler was leaving. With horses snoring nervously, but no one understood them. The horde slept, the king died—and the steppe was as indifferent as ever.

So the night ended not in glory, but in indifference.

There was no one there. No brother, no son, no wife, no enemy, no friend. No scribe to record everything, no priest to murmur prayers. Only dust. Dust that crept through the tent, settled in every crack, clung to the skin, and crept into the lungs. Dust was the only witness.

Attila lay there, breathing heavily, his chest like an anvil, cracking under too many blows. Blood in his throat, his tongue heavy as stone. He coughed, but the dust took the sound, swallowed it as it swallowed everything. Dust had no eyes, no ears – but he was there. He was always there.

The Romans would have invented stories, written songs, constructed a death full of symbols. But the steppe didn't write songs. It wrote in dust. And the dust was honest: it showed the traces, the drops of blood, the twitching that soon ceased. Dust was the only archive, and it preserved everything until the wind carried it away again.

Perhaps that was fairer. For eyes lie, tongues lie, songs lie. Dust doesn't lie. It settles on the dead and the living, indifferently, relentlessly. Today Attila, tomorrow the man next to him, the day after tomorrow the one who will succeed him. Dust sees no difference.

Attila felt it. He knew no one saw him now. No man, no god. Only dust. And that suited him. He was tired of eyes staring at him, of voices cheering or cursing him. In the end, he was left alone with what he had started with: dust.

No witness but dust. And perhaps that was more honest than any chronicle that could ever be written.

Kings should die majestically, the stories said. Upright, with a final look that made history. But Attila wheezed like a dog that had been beaten for too long. No pathos, no brilliance. Just the throaty rattle of a body that could no longer bear it.

His chest rose unevenly, like bellows long since punctured. Every breath sounded like a knife in the mud, wet, disgusting, dragging. No royal cry, no thunder. Only this animal sound that showed: Here, not the ruler of the Huns was dying, here was a body dying, one as tired as any other animal when it could go no further.

The Romans had fabricated lies. "He died in prayer." "He died like a hero." "He spoke last words that moved the world." All theater, all rubbish. In truth, there

were no last words. In truth, there were only wheezing, spitting, blood in the beard, and eyes that didn't know whether they were open or closed.

The horde slept, the fire smoldered, the horse snorted outside. And inside the tent lay Attila, gasping like an animal no one pitied. No singing, no watch. Only this sound, echoing between the tent walls as if it were already an echo.

Perhaps that was fairer. For he was no god, no demigod, no hero of songs. He was flesh, bone, and blood. He was dust playing king. And now the steppe was showing him that he was nothing more than an animal that wheezed until it fell silent.

A king wheezes like an animal. And no one applauds.

The Romans placed crowns of gold on the heads of their rulers. Heavy, shining, as a sign that they were more than human. But Attila's last crown was dirt. Dust clinging to his forehead, blood running over his lips, earth eating into his hair. No shine, no precious stones. Just dirt as a crown.

It was honest. More honest than any jewel, more honest than any symbol. Because that was the truth: Every king, every ruler, every man, no matter how many cities he burned, how many women he took, how many enemies he broke – in the end, he received the same crown. Dirt, dust, blood. The crown that no one wanted, but that everyone deserved.

Attila lay there, half upright, half fallen, his eyes fixed, his mouth open. No final command, no final words. Only dirt on his tongue, as if the steppe itself were swallowing him up. His hands, which once held swords, lay limp, his fingers bent like broken branches. The earth took him back as if it had never given him up.

The Huns outside slept, unaware. They dreamed, perhaps, of women, of wine, of booty. No one knew that at that moment their king was receiving his final crown. No gold, no splendor—only dirt covering him. The steppe didn't celebrate kings. It devoured them as it devoured everything.

And perhaps that was the only justice there was. That in the end, no lies mattered anymore. No fame, no song, no statue. Only dirt that said, "You are no more than the rest. You are dust."

Dirt as a crown. That's how the king ended. That's how everything ended.

## Funeral without tears

The Huns didn't celebrate death with tears. They celebrated it with meat, smoke, and silence. A king had fallen, yes. But what did that mean? Men died every day, horses collapsed, children starved, women vanished into the dust. Death was not the exception; it was the rule. So why cry?

Attila lay cold in the tent while outside the men built a fire. They threw meat into the fire, tore apart hides, and tossed bones into the embers until it crackled like rain. The sky was black, the smoke rose high, and they drank as if nothing had happened.

The Romans would have wept, held processions, and summoned priests. But the Huns spit on such things. They said: "If a man falls, the earth eats him. We eat because we're still alive." It couldn't be put more simply.

The silence was the only thing that felt different. Usually, they laughed, roared, and sang dirty songs. But tonight, a weight hung over everything. No tears, no howling. Just silence, thick as dust, heavy as iron. Men chewed meat without saying much. Everyone knew what had happened, but no one said it.

There was no honor, no holiness, no pathos. It was a funeral ceremony without tears. A feast, a drink, a silence. And that was precisely what was more honest than any Roman ceremony.

The Romans would have sung songs. High voices, choirs, harps, trumpets. Every word would have been a lie, but they would have done it. The Huns would not. No song for kings. No verse, no melody. Only the crackling of meat in the fire, the gulping of wine, the snorting of horses in the dark.

Attila didn't get a song. He didn't even get a dirty chorus, no roaring laughter, no ballad by the fire. Why? Because a song pretended death was something special. But here it was ordinary. Like hunger. Like dust. Like blood. It wasn't something to sing about.

The men chewed meat, each bite as heavy as a stone. No one felt like singing. No one wanted to lie. Because what could anyone say? "He was great"? – Everyone was great while they were alive. "He was strong"? – Everyone was strong until they lay in the dust. "He was king"? – Screw it. Now he was cold.

The women in the shadows knew it too. No lament escaped their lips. Only silence. A song would have pretended he had died differently than anyone else.

But he was no different. No sword, no heroic death. Only dirt in his mouth and blood in his throat.

No song fit for kings. Only the dull drumming of hearts, the crackling of the fire, and the silence that was heavier than any melody.

Tears were for other peoples. For Romans in white togas, for women scratching at doors, for priests raising their voices to the wind. The Huns knew no tears. If they did let anything flow, it was wine. Red, thick, and acrid. No water, no salt from the eyes—only the burn of the alcohol in the throat.

The cups were passed around, the skins emptied. Men sloshed until they fell over. They drank because they were alive, and because the king was dead. Not to honor him, but to fill the silence that would otherwise have overwhelmed everything. Every sip was a response to death: "You take one, we'll drink double."

Attila didn't get tears. He got wine. Drops that fell into the dust, spilled by trembling hands, mingled with blood from the flesh, with dripping fat. That was his "funeral song": the smell of alcohol and roasted meat, mingled with smoke and dust.

The men didn't even raise a glass. No "To the King." No "To Attila." Just drinking. Greedily, silently, desperately. Wine ran over beards, dripped onto furs, stained the earth dark. The earth drank along, as it always did.

Wine instead of tears. You couldn't be more honest. Tears were a lie, wine was a lie. It burned, it blunted, it was direct. And the Huns wanted to be direct. No pity, no pathos. Just booze.

So the night passed: Men fell asleep, women watched, children slept between empty wineskins. A king was dead. The wine flowed. That was all.

Names were weak against fire. You could call them, shout them, carve them into wood, put them into songs – the fire just laughed. It devoured the letters, the voices, the memories. Attila, the terror of the world, sounded in the fire like any other cracking of wood. No distinction between king and servant. Fire devoured all names equally.

The Huns looked into the flames, but no one spoke his name. Why should they? They knew he had already been burned long before he was laid to rest. A name meant nothing when the man was cold. He was dust, and dust needed no name.

The fire hissed, spat sparks, tore flesh apart, bones cracked. Men stared into it as if to see if the sky held answers. But it didn't. It was only hungry. Fire was like the steppe: greedy, indifferent, insatiable. You could throw a hundred names into it—it made no difference.

The Romans built tablets, wrote histories, and immortalized their emperors. The Huns were unfamiliar with this nonsense. They knew: A name only lives as long as someone shouted it. And if the fire was louder, the name was gone. Attila had already disappeared before the sun rose again.

Fire consumes names because names weigh nothing. Flesh weighs, bones weigh, blood stinks. But a name? It's lighter than smoke.

That's how they saw it: The fire took him, as it took everything. No tears, no song, no memorial. Only flames that consumed everything—including Attila.

The Romans built tombs like palaces. Marble, statues, columns, words carved in stone that were meant to last for centuries. It was all a damned hoax. Because in the end, the worms came, and worms didn't read inscriptions.

The Huns knew this. They gave their dead no palaces, no monuments. No grave, just earth. A hole, a body, dust over it, that's it. The living rode on. The dead had no further say. Simple, brutal, honest.

Attila didn't receive the grave that kings usually deserve. No shrine, no temple, no golden coffin. Just earth. Earth that swallowed him up as if it had been waiting for him for a long time. The men threw him in, silently, without words. No "goodbye," no "rest in peace." Only shovels dumping dirt on him, dully, indifferently.

The earth took him back, as it took everything back. Flesh, bones, blood, names. Everything disappeared there. No distinction between king and beggar, between rider and child. Only earth, swallowing.

The Romans would have called it "shame." But for the Huns, it was truth. They knew: A grave was just a lie made of stone. Earth didn't lie. Earth said, "You are nothing anymore. And that's a good thing."

No grave, just dirt. That was Attila's memorial. A hole in the ground that soon looked like any other.

An empire doesn't die with a scream. It dies in silence. No bugle call, no final parade. Just an empty tent, a cold fire, horses nervously pawing the ground, and men pretending to sleep.

The Huns had screamed, robbed, burned, devoured, and drunk. They had terrified Europe, made emperors tremble, and emptied cities. But as the king disappeared into the ground, so too did his voice. No more commands, no more curses, no more laughter. Only this silence, which was more difficult than any battle.

Silence crept through the camp. It settled on the men's shoulders, it lay in the tents, it pressed on their chests like an invisible stone. Even the dogs didn't bark. Even the children didn't cry. The women watched but said nothing. Everything was swallowed up.

The Romans would have blown trumpets, made speeches, and drowned out death. The Huns didn't know this lie. They kept quiet. They let the silence consume whatever it was worth: the king, the celebration, the empire.

For the empire was never walls, never gold, never titles. The empire was Attila. And Attila was dead. What remained was silence. And the silence consumed everything.

Thus the funeral ended without tears. No song, no grave, no cry. Only silence that swallowed the empire until nothing remained.

The Romans believed the wind carried stories. That it blew names across fields, brought fame to cities, and blew songs through the centuries. All bullshit. The wind carried none of this. It came, it whistled, it stirred up dust, and then it was gone again. No name remained, no king, no empire.

As the Huns threw earth over Attila, a wind blew through the camp. It lifted the smoke, swirled dust over faces, and blew into the horses' manes. And yet it took nothing with it. No echo, no story. Only cold air that came and went.

The men felt it. They saw the wind roar through the tents, tearing the last sparks from the fire. But no one believed it carried anything further. They knew: If they didn't scream, if they didn't tear, if they didn't eat – then nothing would remain. The wind didn't create memories. It only created emptiness.

Attila was dead, and the wind blew over his grave as if nothing had ever been there. No golden dust, no divine breath. Only the same cold breath that also blew over the bones of horses and peasants.

So it ended: no song, no monument, no echo. Only wind, which carried nothing away. Attila, the Hun king, was not lifted into the sky. He was laid to dust, and the wind blew over him, indifferent.

A funeral without tears, without voices, without echoes. Only wind that consumes everything and speaks nothing.

## Steppe is silent, only wind remains

The steppe never talked much. It had no interest in stories, no desire for heroes, no patience for fame. It was there, vast, dry, merciless. And if someone thought they had defeated it, it just waited until they were dead. Then it devoured them. Whole. Without a fuss, without a sound.

Attila wasn't the first she devoured, and he wouldn't be the last. The steppe wasn't an audience you could impress. It didn't listen when you boasted, it didn't laugh when you cursed it. It was silent. And that silence was harder than any sword, more brutal than any fire.

After Attila's death, only this silence remained. No thunder, no echo, no sign. Men rode on, women grabbed, children screamed. But the steppe took none of it seriously. It spread its silence like a carpet over everything. As if nothing had happened. As if no king had ever ridden here.

Emptiness – that was their law. No palaces, no cities, no monuments. Only grass, which came and went. Earth that swallowed everything. Wind that erased everything. The steppe was memoryless, and that made it stronger than all the empires combined.

The Romans built on stone. The Huns rode on dust. In the end, the steppe won. It devoured the Huns just as it devoured the Romans. It devoured Attila just as it devoured the nameless horsemen. No exceptions, no titles. Only emptiness that consumes everything.

The wind was the only one who remained. No men, no women, no children, no king. Everything went, everything died, everything fell. Only the wind always came back. It was the only witness, but it remembered nothing. It moved across the steppe, over the graves, over the bones, and took nothing with it. No name, no song, no face.

The Romans would have made him a god, the wind as a messenger, the voice of heaven. But the wind didn't speak. It whispered nothing, it told nothing. It only raised dust, it whistled through empty tents, it bent down the grass. A witness without memory, an observer without memory.

Attila, the Hun king, was nothing to the wind. It blew over him, just as it blew over any dead dog, any abandoned village, any old fireplace. No distinction. The wind made no heroes, it made no distinctions. It was indifferent, and that's precisely why it stayed.

The men who survived may have believed they carried stories. But these stories, too, were consumed by the wind. Words crumbled into the roar, voices were drowned out. The wind was louder than anything else, and he remembered nothing.

So he remained the only witness. But one who could testify to nothing. One who saw everything and forgot everything again.

Wind as the only witness – so died the empire, so died the king, so died every memory.

An echo requires walls, valleys, rocks, something to reflect the scream. The steppe had none of those. It was flat, vast, empty. You could open your throat, scream at the sky, roar your name, and nothing would come back. No echo. Only dust, moving as if it were laughing at you.

Attila could have roared his name to the heavens, and the steppe would still have swallowed him. A scream, a cough, a final command—everything would have vanished into nothingness. No echo, no answer. Only silence that consumed you.

The Romans believed their voices echoed through the centuries. They built stones, they carved words, they believed the world would hear them. But even their echoes died eventually. Dust settled over them, grass grew, wind blew. The steppe knew: an echo was only an illusion, a brief trick before the dust took everything.

The Huns never believed in echoes. They roared, yes, but not because they wanted to be heard. They roared because they were alive. And when the roar died away, it didn't matter. Then came dust. Dust that made everything equal. Dust that knew no past, no future. Only the present, dry, bitter, without memory.

No echo, only dust. That was the truth of the steppe. It repeated nothing. It forgot immediately. And perhaps that was more honest than any history book, any monument, any song.

Attila died, and the steppe didn't respond. It sent no echo. It sent only dust.

Smoke had no form. It came from fire, from flesh, from wood—it rose, twisted, drew lines in the air, and then it was gone. No residue, no weight, no imprint. So the riders disappeared. Not in songs, not in monuments, not in books. They vanished like smoke.

Attila wasn't the only one. His men, the hundreds of thousands who burned cities, subdued emperors, and swept through lands like a storm—they too dissolved. One by one. Horses, bones, voices. All smoke.

The Romans wrote their names on tablets, carved them into stone, and painted pictures. But even their emperors eventually vanished, like smoke in the wind. The Huns never pretended they could stay. They knew they were just smoke. That you could smell them as long as they were there, that your eyes watered when they passed through—but as soon as the wind came, there was nothing left.

The camp after Attila's death looked like an extinguished fire. A few sparks, a few smoldering fires, a bit of smoke. But no more storm, no more burning sky. Men were still riding, but it was different. No longer like thunder, but like residual warmth. Smoke that was soon devoured by the wind.

Riders vanish like smoke. First you see them, smell them, curse them. Then you turn around – and there's nothing. No weight, no trace. Only dust remains.

People always acted as if the sky had eyes. As if it were watching, as if it remembered. Priests prayed high, kings cried out loud, soldiers died looking up. All nonsense. The sky was just a blanket, a big piece of nothingness. And it forgot quickly.

Attila might have immersed it in blood, in fire, in smoke – the next morning it was blue again, empty, indifferent. No red, no black, no rumbling. Only vastness that acted as if nothing had ever happened. A sky that knew no guilt, no loyalty, no memory.

The Romans told of stars that held their emperors captive, of gods who watched. The Huns spit on such tales. They knew: The sky was as forgetful as a

drunk. Today full of screams, tomorrow blank. Today full of smoke, tomorrow clear.

When Attila died, one might have thought the sky would mark something. A sign, a thunderstorm, a comet. But nothing came. The sky closed the night, and when the sun rose, it acted as if nothing had happened. Attila was dust, and the sky was blue.

That was the greatest humiliation of all. Not the dirt, not the blood, not the wheezing. But that heaven immediately forgot him. Just as it forgot everyone. Warriors, women, children, kings. He retained nothing.

Heaven forgets quickly. And perhaps that was the only truth that united all realms.

The steppe never had kings. Men gave themselves titles, brandished swords, built camps, and shouted orders. But the steppe laughed at all of this. It rolled grass over the paths, let the wind erase the tracks, and devoured the hearths. A man could call himself ruler—to the steppe, he was just another body that it would soon swallow.

Attila was no different. He was great, he was a storm, he was a terror. But the steppe saw him as nothing more than flesh on a horse. And when he fell, nothing changed. No river bent, no grass stopped growing, no sky opened. The steppe took him as it took all, and moved on.

The Romans built walls, palaces, and thrones. They thought kings would rule the world. The Huns rode through and demonstrated that walls collapsed, palaces burned, and thrones rotted. But the steppe didn't need this proof. It had long known that there are no kings. Only dust, wind, and grass.

The men who remained behind sensed this. They still talked, they drank, they swore. But deep down, they knew: Attila was nothing special for the steppe. He was just another name that was disappearing. Tomorrow it would be their turn, and the steppe would be just as silent.

Steppe without kings—that was the only truth. No crown lasted, no title remained. Only wind, only earth, only emptiness.

In the end, nothing remained. No king, no song, no grave, no glory. Men died, women disappeared, children turned to dust. Cities burned, rivers dried up, horses fell. Everything dissolved. Everything was gone. Everything rotted.

Only the wind remained.

He roamed the same plains Attila had ridden across. He crawled over graves, over bones, over old hearths. He blew through crumbling camps, through cities no longer inhabited, over roads that led nowhere. The wind showed no consideration. It carried nothing. It remembered nothing. It was just there.

The Romans would write that Attila terrified the world. The Huns would say he was a storm. But the steppe laughed, and the wind blew on. To him, Attila was nothing but a trail in the dust, which vanished an hour later.

The men still riding felt it. Every step of their horse, every breath, was only borrowed. The wind was already waiting. It would take them as it had taken Attila, as it would take Rome, as it took everything. Not today, not tomorrow—but soon.

And when it was all over, when no name remained, when no more songs were sung, when the last fires had cooled—then the wind was still there. Light, cold, indifferent.

In the end, all that remains is wind. No glory, no king. Just wind.

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