

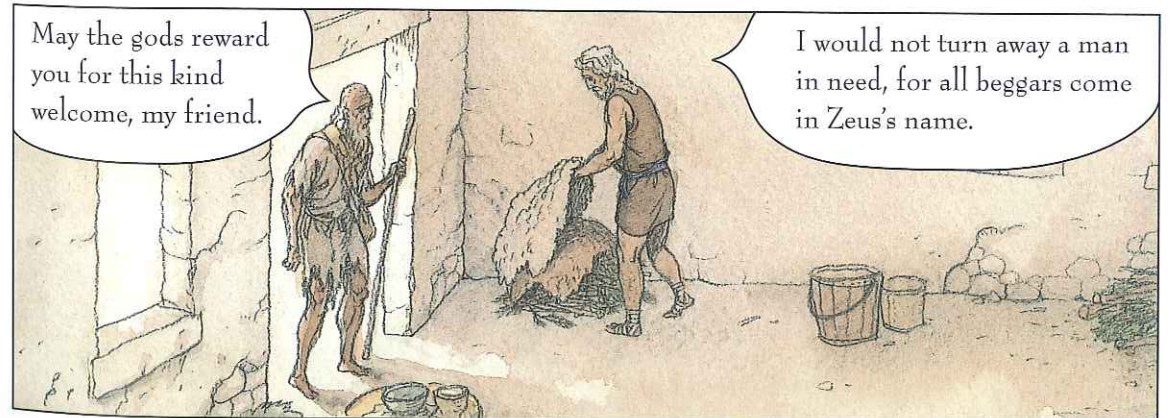
You had a close call there, stranger. You might have been mauled here at my very gate, and I'd have been to blame.

Come in, have something to eat, and tell me who you are.

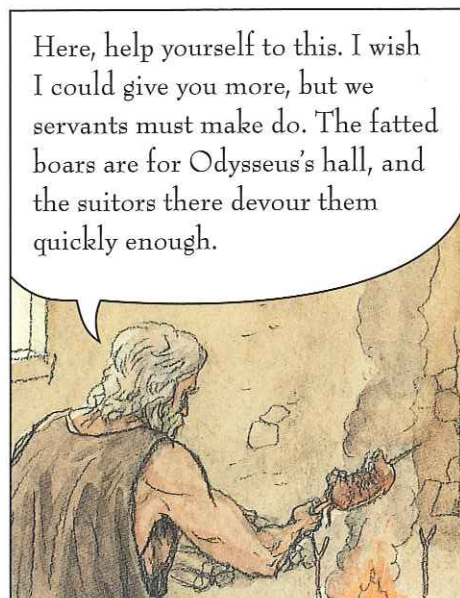


May the gods reward you for this kind welcome, my friend.

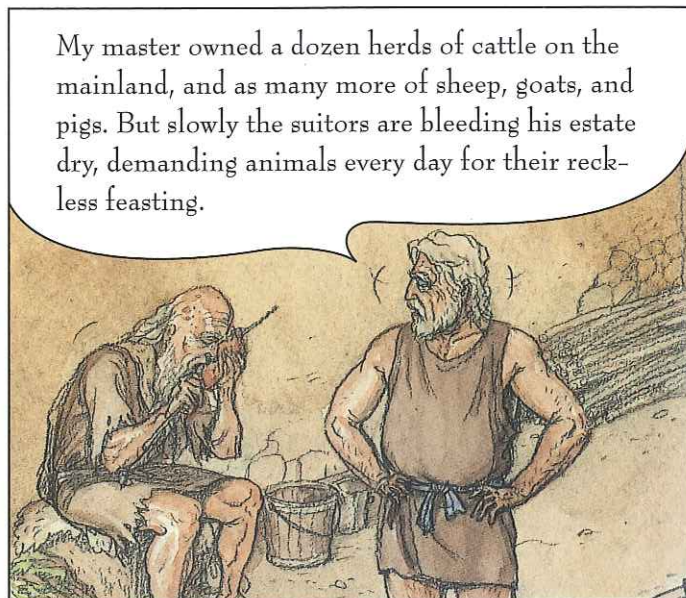
I would not turn away a man in need, for all beggars come in Zeus's name.



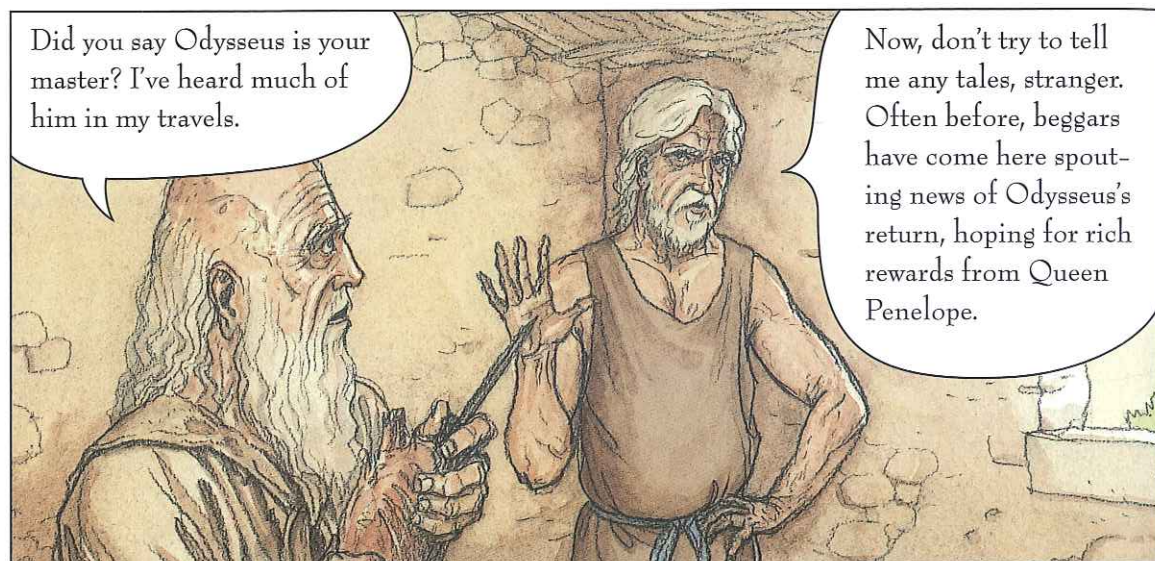




Here, help yourself to this. I wish I could give you more, but we servants must make do. The fatted boars are for Odysseus's hall, and the suitors there devour them quickly enough.

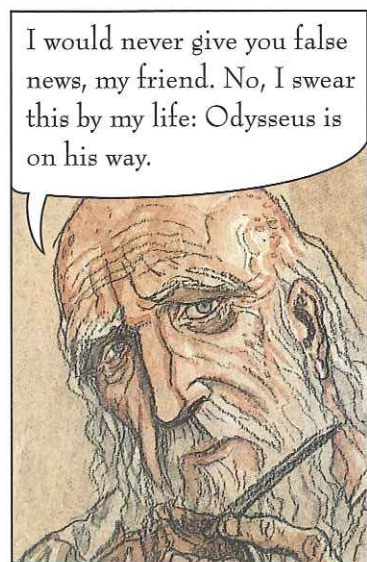


My master owned a dozen herds of cattle on the mainland, and as many more of sheep, goats, and pigs. But slowly the suitors are bleeding his estate dry, demanding animals every day for their reckless feasting.

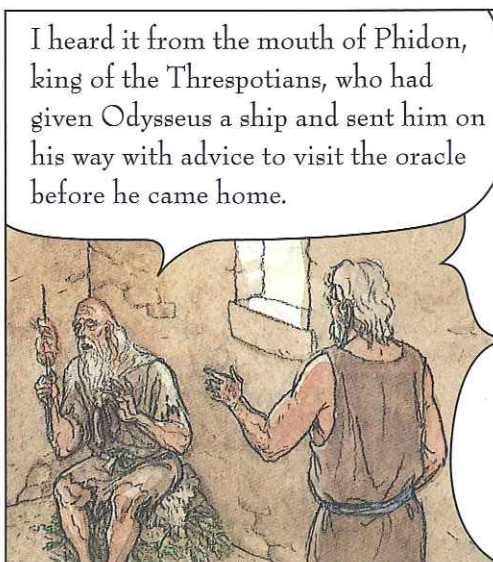


Did you say Odysseus is your master? I've heard much of him in my travels.

Now, don't try to tell me any tales, stranger. Often before, beggars have come here spouting news of Odysseus's return, hoping for rich rewards from Queen Penelope.



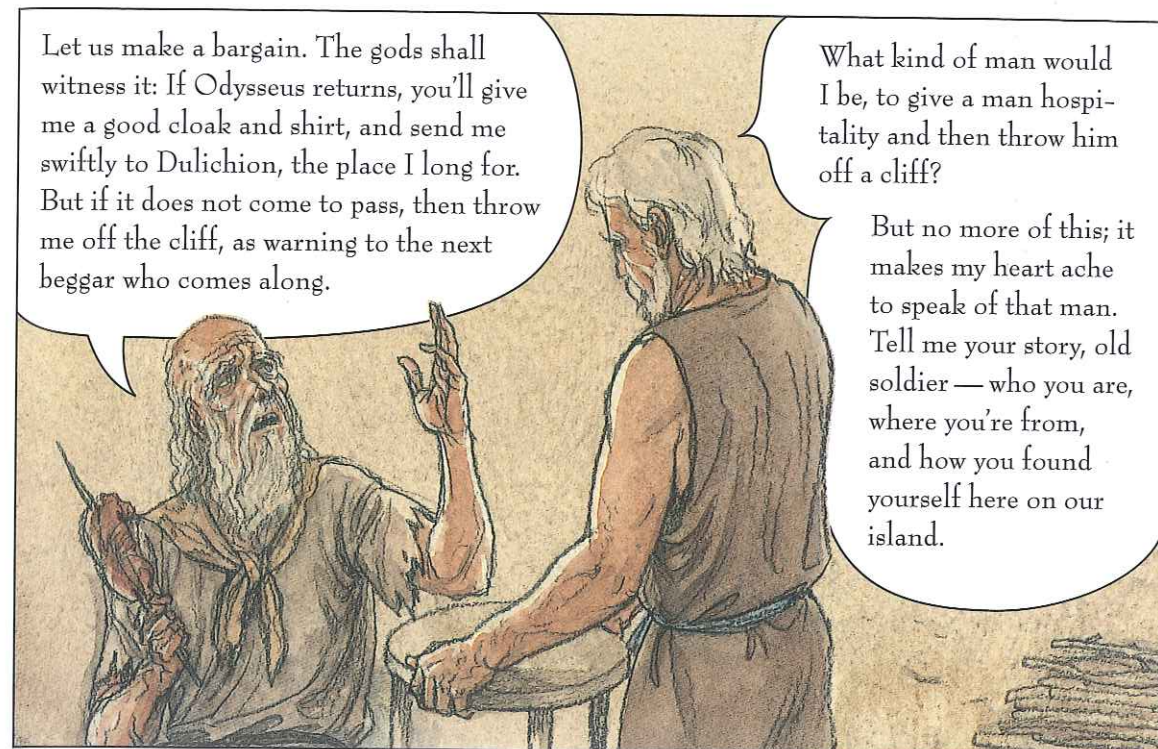
I would never give you false news, my friend. No, I swear this by my life: Odysseus is on his way.



I heard it from the mouth of Phidon, king of the Threspotians, who had given Odysseus a ship and sent him on his way with advice to visit the oracle before he came home.

I heard a similar tale from another traveler who came here. Odysseus was in Crete, he said, outfitting his ship and gathering rich gifts to bring home.

That was three years ago. No, you'll never get me to believe tales of Odysseus's return.



Let us make a bargain. The gods shall witness it: If Odysseus returns, you'll give me a good cloak and shirt, and send me swiftly to Dulichion, the place I long for. But if it does not come to pass, then throw me off the cliff, as warning to the next beggar who comes along.

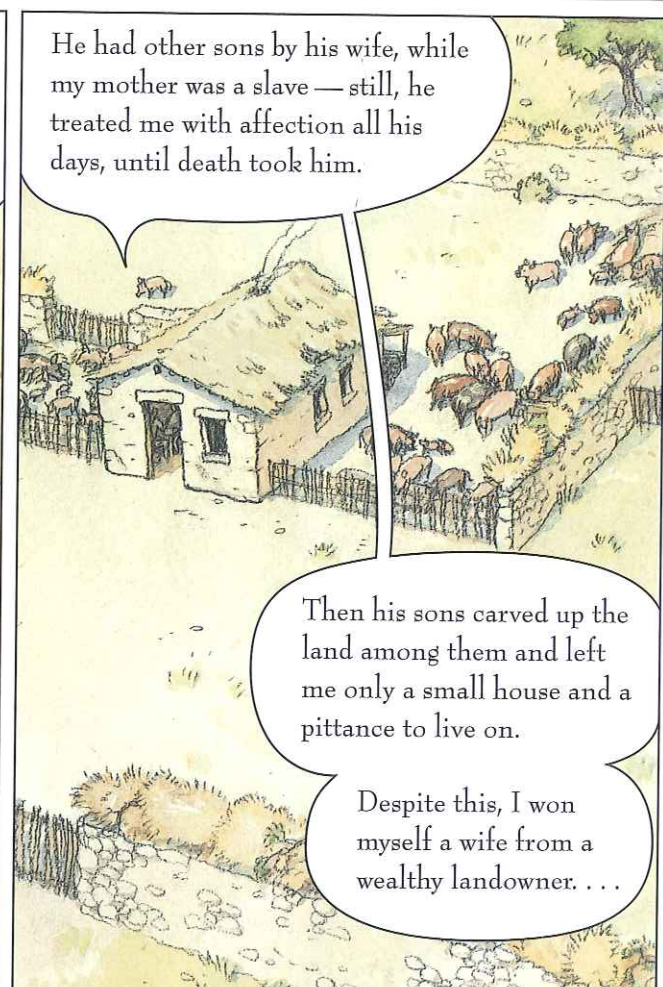
What kind of man would I be, to give a man hospitality and then throw him off a cliff?

But no more of this; it makes my heart ache to speak of that man. Tell me your story, old soldier — who you are, where you're from, and how you found yourself here on our island.



Oh, friend, if we could sit here undisturbed, and the food and wine held out, I could spend a year telling you all my trials, the endless heart-ache the gods have given me.

I hail from the land of Crete, and I was a rich man's son.



He had other sons by his wife, while my mother was a slave — still, he treated me with affection all his days, until death took him.

Then his sons carved up the land among them and left me only a small house and a pittance to live on.

Despite this, I won myself a wife from a wealthy landowner. . . .