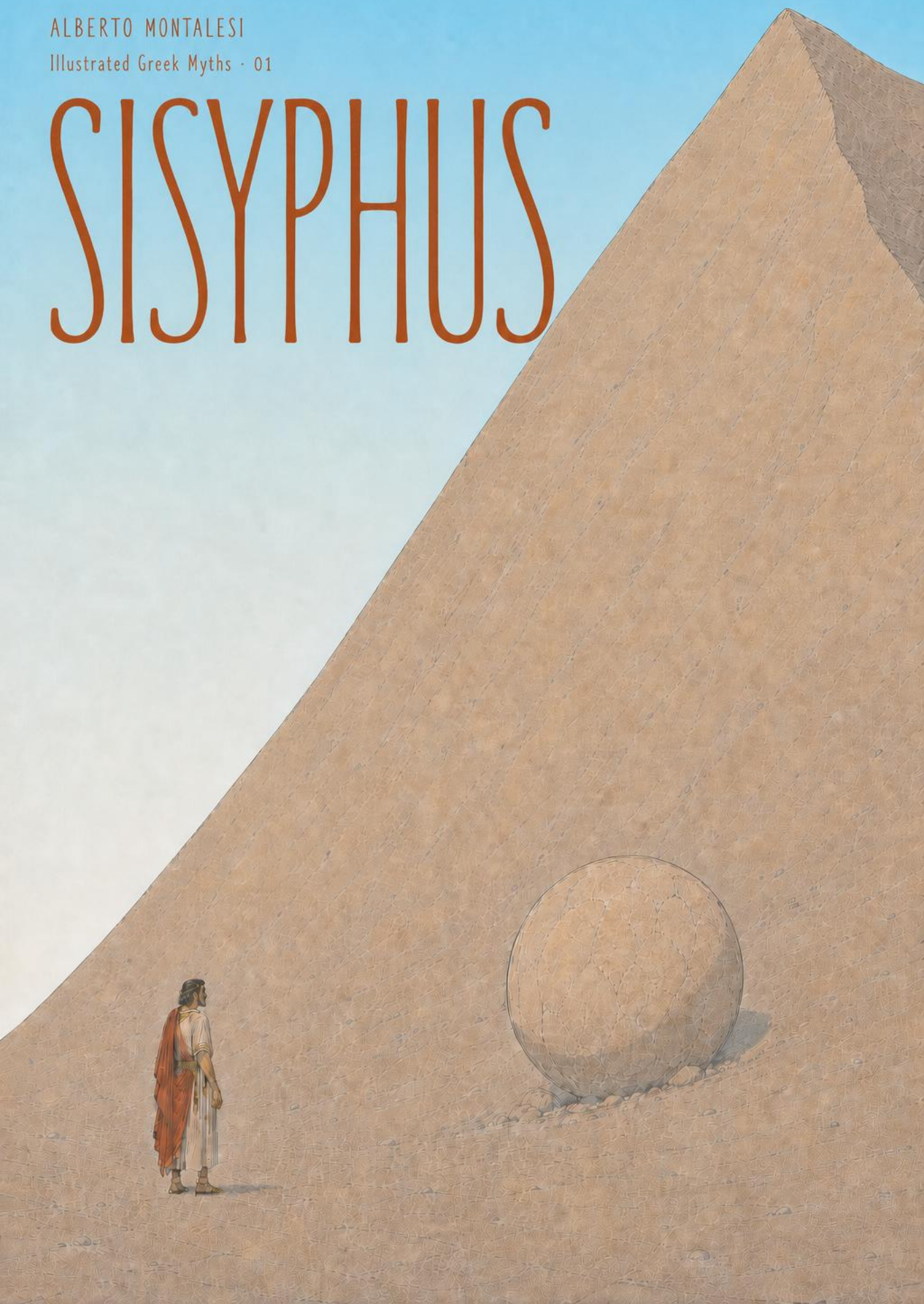


ALBERTO MONTALESI

Illustrated Greek Myths - 01

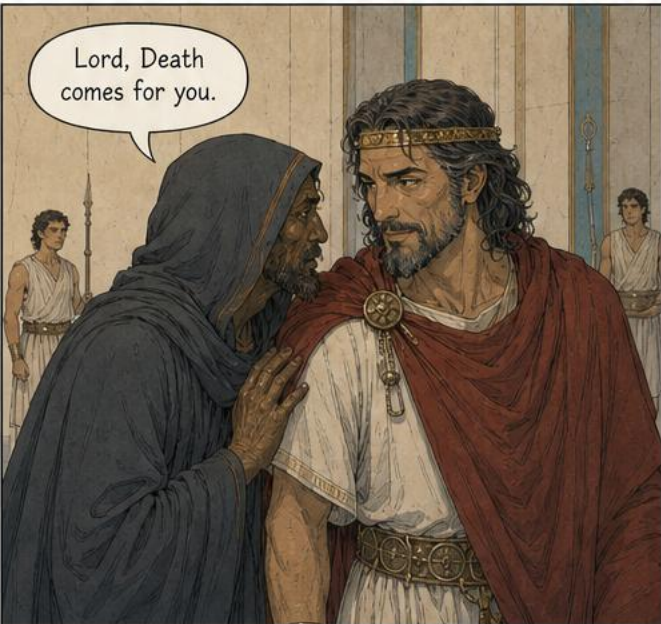
SISYPHUS



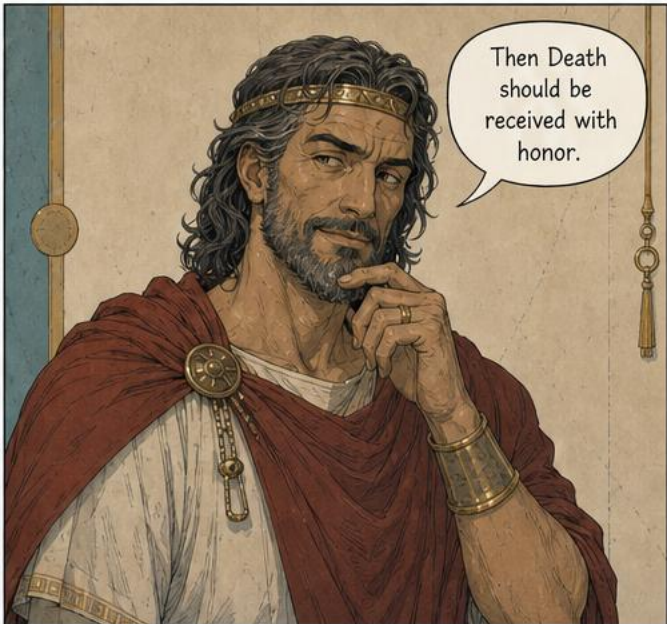
Sisyphus, king of Corinth,
trusted walls, bargains,
and the sharpness of
his own mind.



Lord, Death
comes for you.



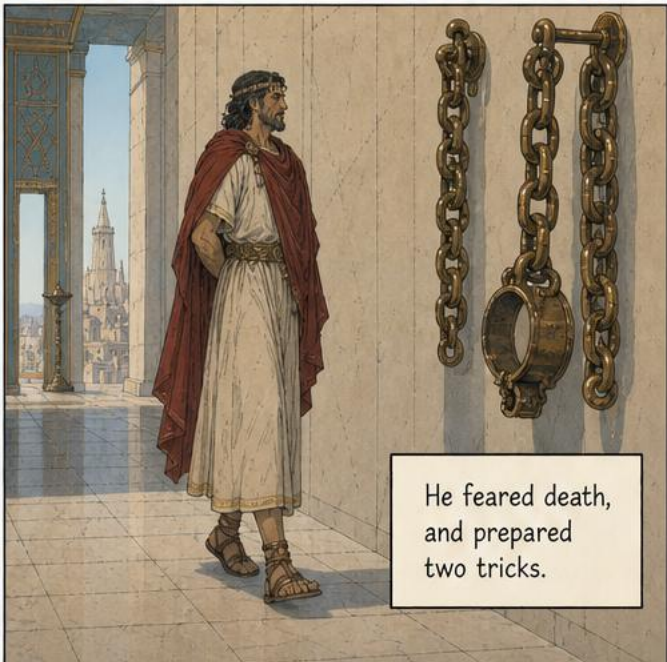
Then Death
should be
received with
honor.



If I die,
leave
the rites undone.



He feared death,
and prepared
two tricks.



Death came
without haste.



Be my guest before
I become your burden.



You speak
as though delay
were still
possible.



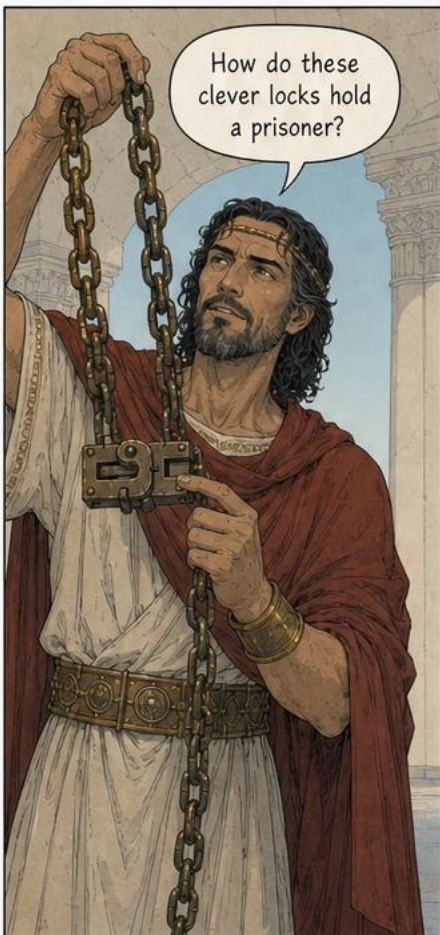
Still, he followed.



He asked
a craftsman's
question with
a prisoner's
urgency.



How do these
clever locks hold
a prisoner?



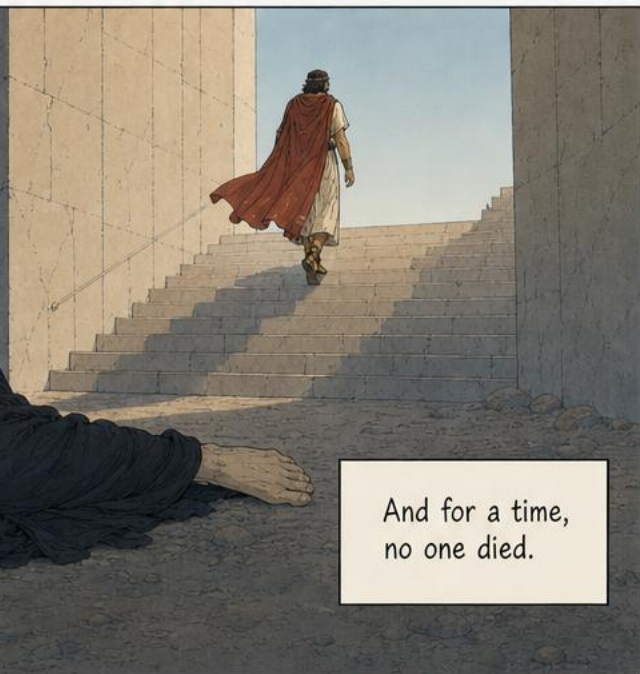
Like this.



Exactly.



And for a time,
no one died.



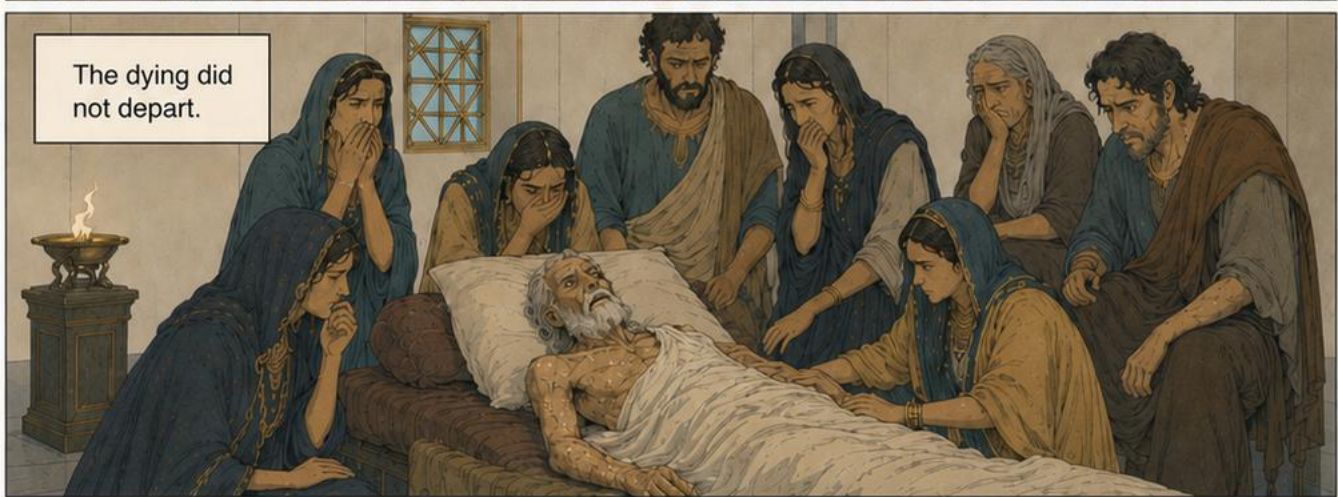
The wounded
could not die.



Why can
I not die?



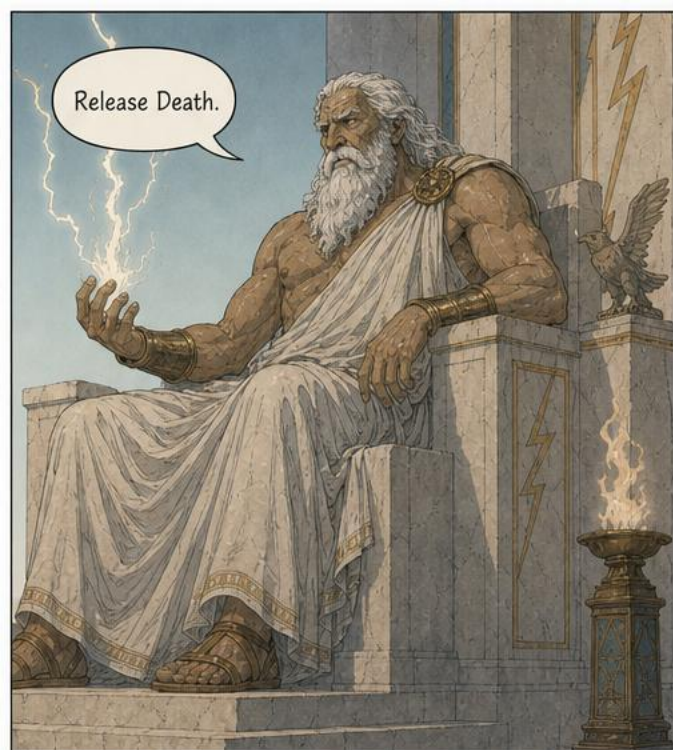
The dying
did not depart.



He has dishonored
gods and men alike.



Release Death.



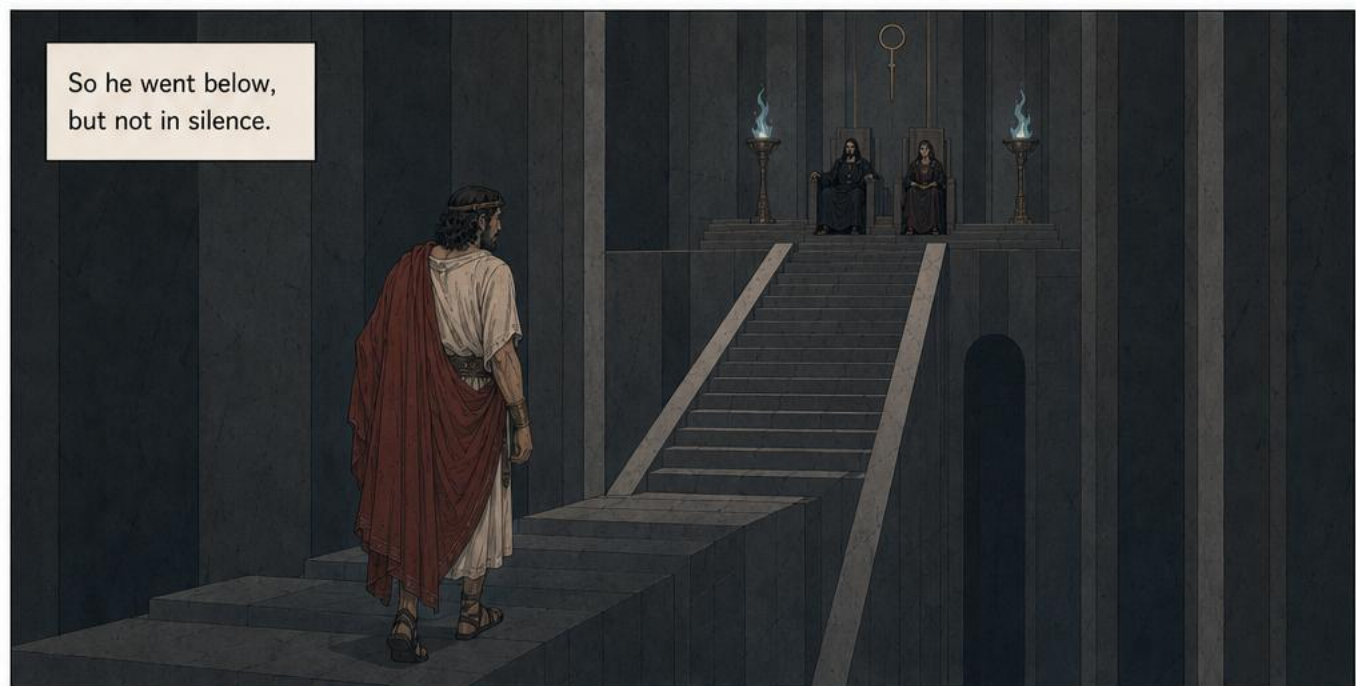
Your wit
bought only delay.



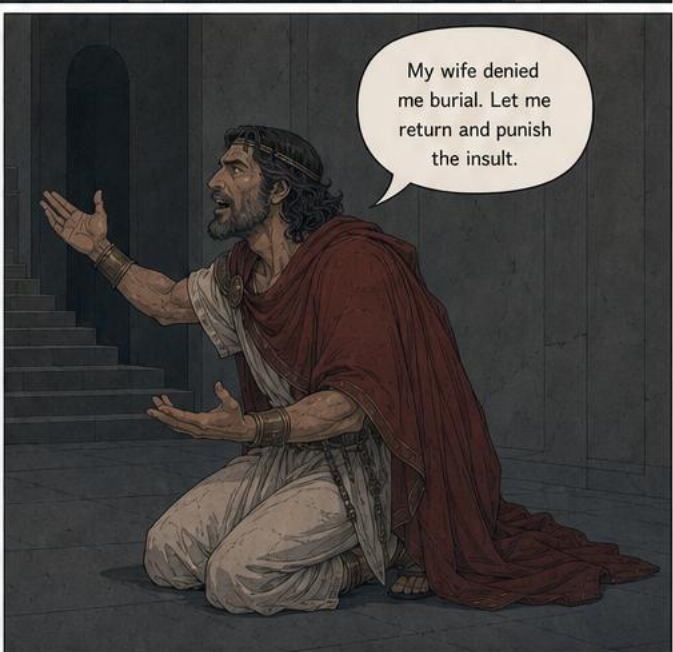
I am not
finished.



So he went below,
but not in silence.



My wife denied
me burial. Let me
return and punish
the insult.



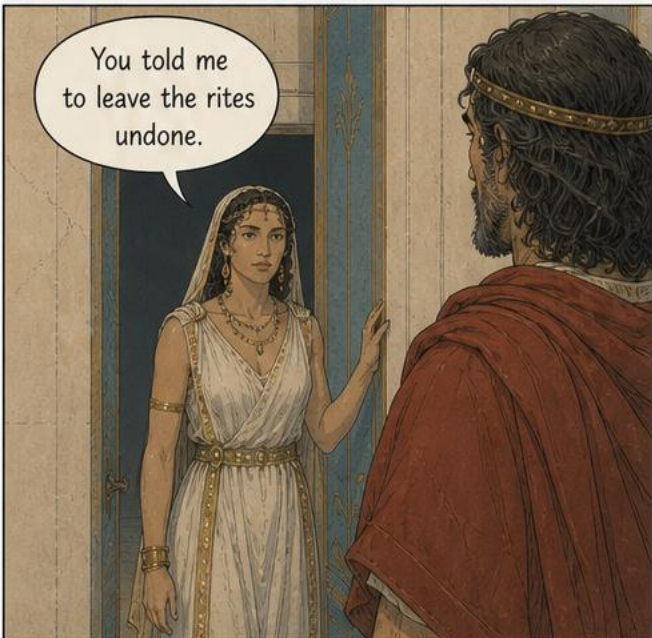
He won a
second delay
by pretending
he had been
wronged.



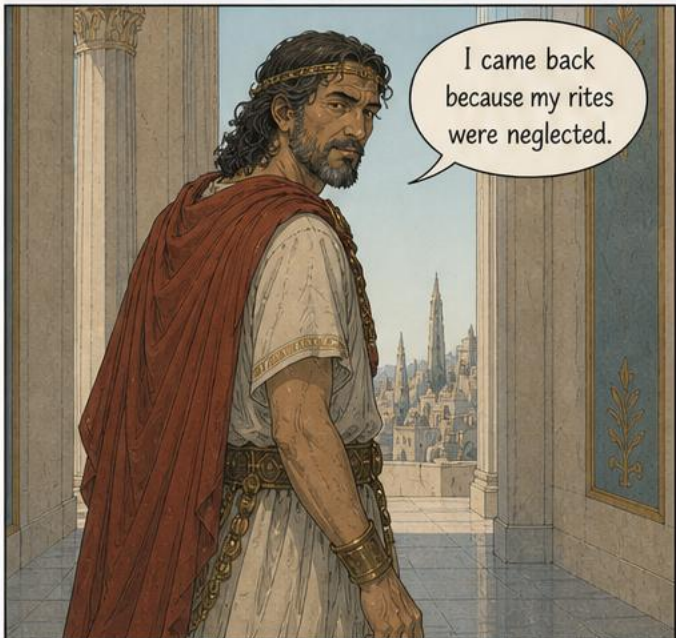
Sent back to set
the rites in order,
he found the sun
persuasive.



You told me
to leave the rites
undone.

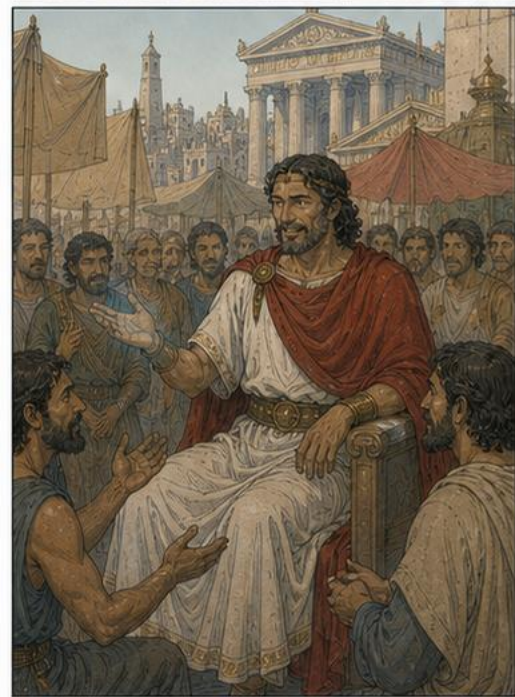


I came back
because my rites
were neglected.

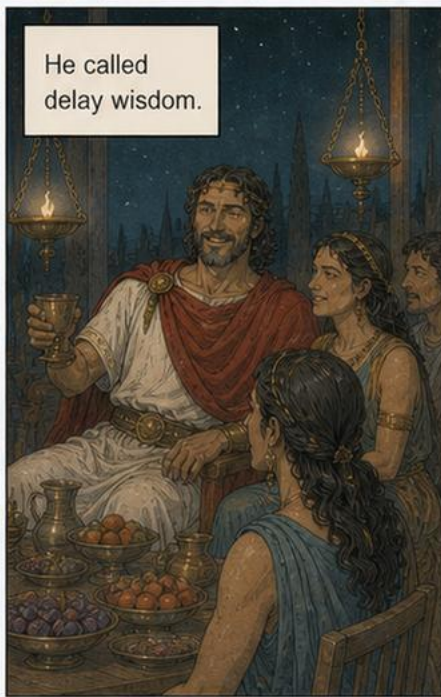


He did not punish
neglect. He simply
stayed.

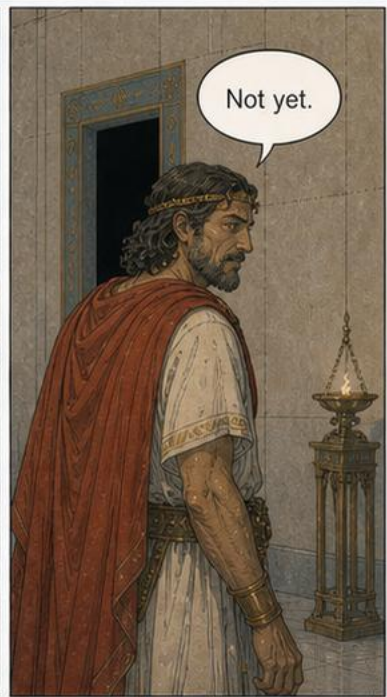
The borrowed
days lengthened
into years.



He called
delay wisdom.

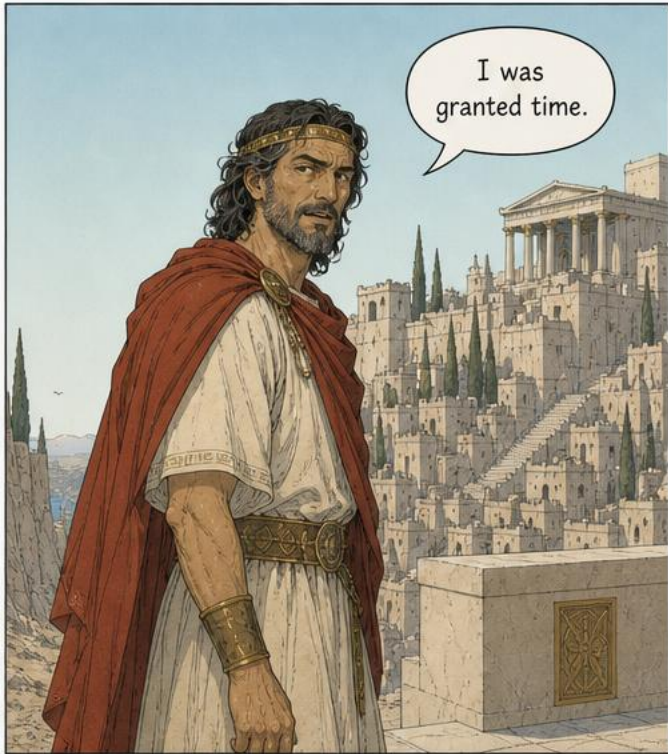


Not yet.



At last, the
gods grew tired
of being patient.

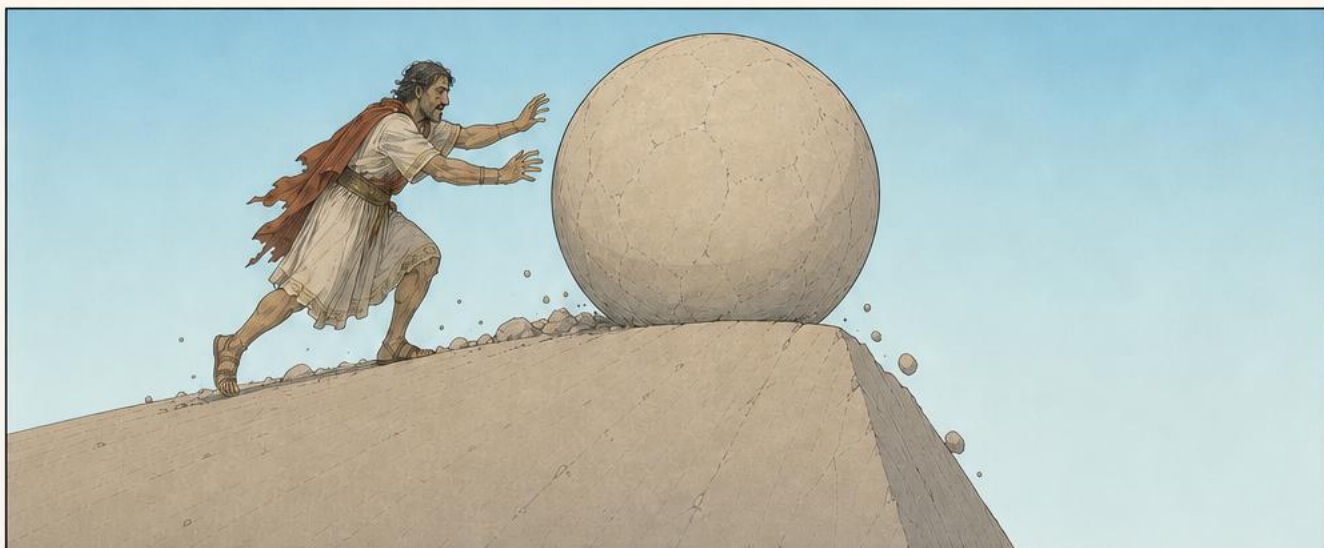
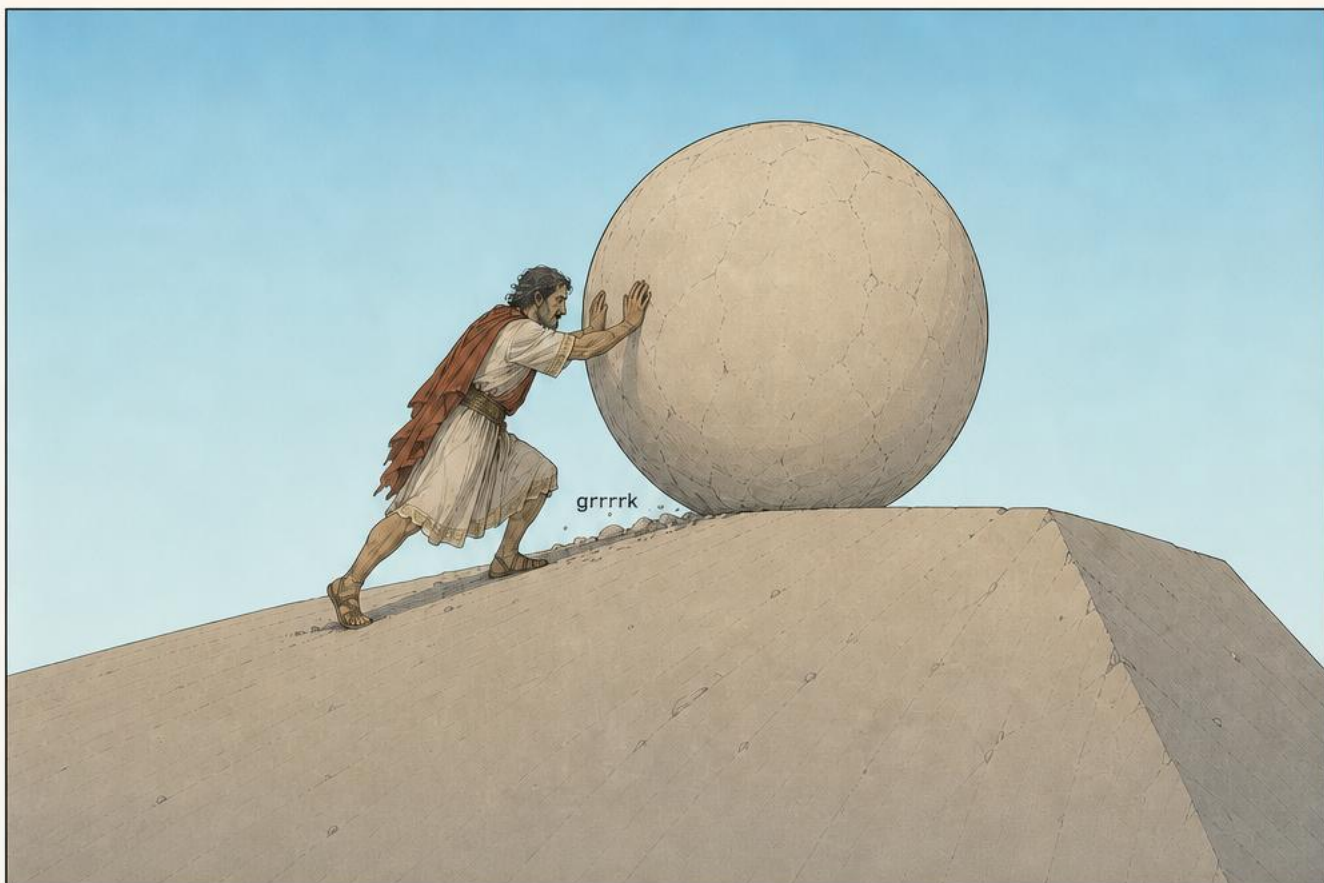
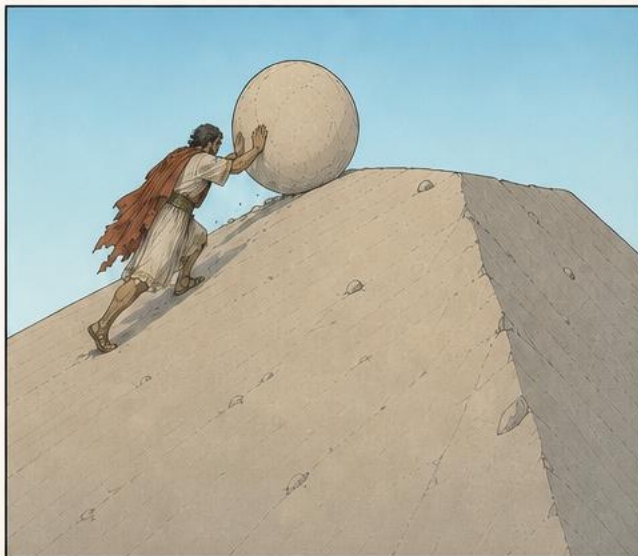
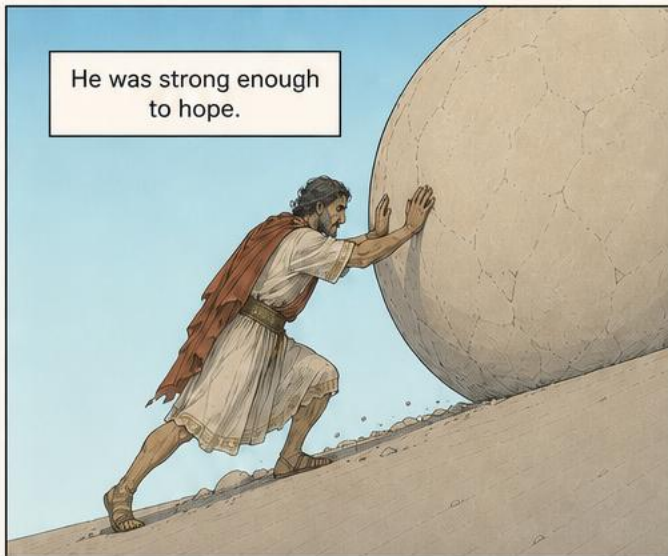




For his answer to
every judgment,
he was given
one labor.



He was strong enough
to hope.



And the stone
rolled back.



Each near-victory
became defeat.



He outwitted death
twice, and earned
a labor that could
not be outwitted.



Time thinned him,
but not the hill.



Sisyphus: A Note on the Myth

The king of ephyra

Sisyphus was remembered as the founder and king of Ephyra, the city later known as Corinth. The ancient stories describe him as wealthy, intelligent, and difficult to deceive. He was not a hero because he was strong. His power came from seeing the weakness in every rule and finding the person who believed that rule could not be bent.

His family was tied to the old divine order. He was usually described as a son of Aeolus, and some traditions made him an ancestor of heroes through his son Glaucus and his grandson Bellerophon. But Sisyphus himself belonged to the human world: a ruler of walls, roads, bargains, and carefully chosen words.

The second escape

Before dying, Sisyphus instructed his wife, Merope, to leave his body without the proper funeral rites. Once in the underworld, he complained that he had been dishonored and persuaded Persephone to let him return briefly to correct the omission. He returned to the living world and simply refused to go back.

That trick succeeded only for a while. The gods sent Hermes to retrieve him. The mortal king had found a loophole in death, but not an escape from consequence.

Ancient sources

The descent and the stone appear most famously in Homer's *Odyssey* (Book 11). Later mythographers, including the author known as Pseudo-Apollodorus, preserve additional details about Sisyphus's dealings with Zeus, Death, and the underworld. The variations are part of the tradition: the myth was retold, recombined, and adapted long before it became a single familiar image.

The first escape

The surviving myth is not one fixed tale. Different ancient writers preserve different crimes and explanations for his punishment.

In one important version, Sisyphus revealed to the river god Asopus that Zeus had carried away Asopus's daughter Aegina. Zeus was powerful, but Sisyphus was protected for a moment by knowledge: he traded the secret for a spring that would strengthen his city. The bargain could not last. Zeus ordered Death to take him.

Sisyphus then trapped Death in bronze chains. For a time, no one could die. Wounds remained open, the old could not pass away, and the order of the world began to fail. Ares eventually freed Death because a war god could not endure a battlefield where death had stopped working. Sisyphus was taken below at last.

The stone

Homer describes Sisyphus in the underworld, straining to push a huge stone up a hill. Each time it nears the summit, the stone rolls back down. The labor begins again, without rest and without completion.

The punishment is precise. Sisyphus is not merely made to suffer pain. He is made to spend his intelligence and strength on a task whose failure is already certain. The cunning that once turned rules against the gods becomes useless when there is no rule left to interpret.

The myth has therefore outlived its original setting. It can be read as a story about pride, punishment, repetition, or the human need to keep moving even when the result cannot be changed. Its final question is not whether Sisyphus can win. It is what remains of a person when winning is no longer possible.